

Going Virtual

A Guide to Webinars and Virtual Events





Going Virtual

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Going Virtual

Virtual events and webinars are becoming increasingly common and companies must deliver the same amazing experiences and outcomes that are expected of live events.

Virtual events are used to deliver a company's strategy, thought leadership messaging, drive leads and revenue, drive adoption and build loyalty. When planning a virtual event, consider what you hope to gain from the event and then focus on how best to achieve those goals via a virtual event.



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Fundamentals

Virtual Event and Webinar Basics

Virtual events with real benefits

Including virtual events as a key digital strategy to your meeting and event program is necessary. While virtual events will never replace live events completely, they will play an increasingly important role.

Benefits of going digital

Flexibility: Hosting a virtual event allows you to tailor the event to your specific business needs. The option to record a virtual event means your event can have a longer shelf life.

Scalability: Virtual options allow you significantly scale to reach a larger audience allowing you to expand your reach and promote brand awareness

Cost-effectiveness: Virtual events are substantially less expensive than in-person events, allowing you to do more with less.

Reliability: Unforeseen circumstances leave in-person events subject to cancellations. The same factors, like weather and travel restrictions, do not need to be taken into consideration for a virtual event.

Engaging: Virtual events offer tools such as polls, Q&A, live chat, and even a downloadable resources section so your attendees can fully engage with your content.

Detailed reporting: One of the biggest benefits of virtual events is the ability to track leads and quantitatively measure event performance and engagement.



Fundamentals of planning a virtual event

In-person and virtual events are different and require different strategies and elements. Virtual events have limitations that in-person events don't. While in-person events can draw attendees with unique destinations and networking opportunities, virtual events rely almost solely on content. Despite the differences, with careful planning and agility, virtual events can be an amazing way to reach your business goals.



Content: In a virtual setting, your content is your event. Powerful keynotes and engaging sessions tailored to your attendees are critical.



Marketing: Targeted, effective promotion is needed to drive attendance.



Engagement: Virtual doesn't have to mean alone. Keep attendees engaged by offering sessions that are relevant to each attendee type. Use polling and Q&A to keep the sessions dynamic.



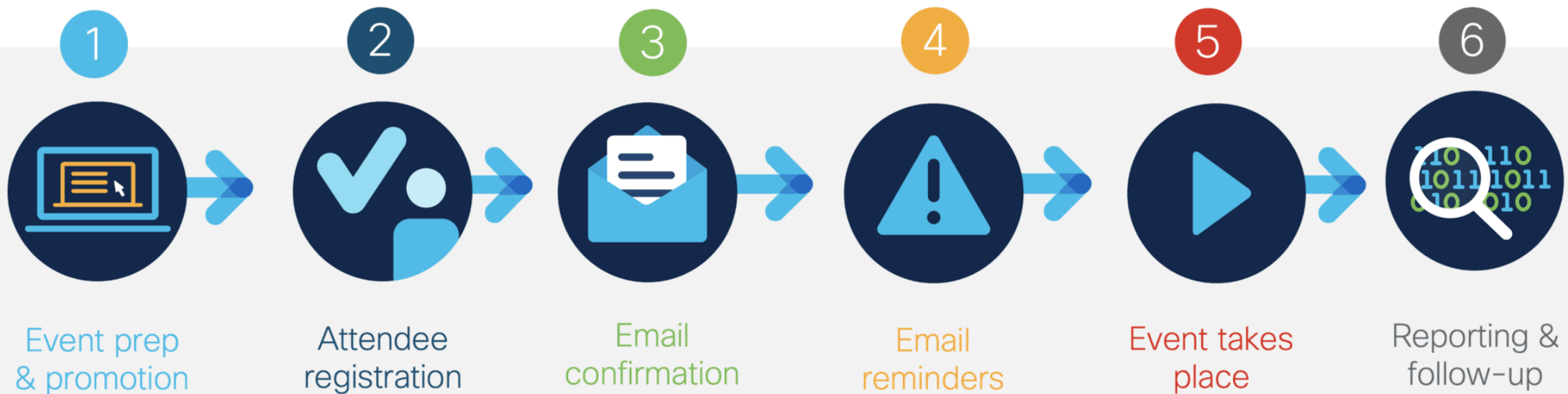
Data: Metrics are essential to prove event success. Measuring engagement and capturing attendee data are the only way to prove event ROI and activate the buyer's journey. Tracking attendee's behavior provides critical insights for follow up communications and helps shape content for future events.

Elements of a virtual event

A virtual event is built around content, attendee engagement and data. Video production quality and connectivity are important, as well as the event website. Here are some key elements to consider when planning a virtual event:

- Website
- Event registration
- Live presentation content
- Live, one-way audio/video
- Live polling or Q&A
- Recorded content
- Interactive video conferencing
- Surveys

Standard online event structure





Taking Your Live Event Virtual

Considerations when Changing Formats

Develop stream-worthy content

For a virtual event, **content is king**.

If you had planned for a live event, you may already have many elements of your content strategy figured out, giving you a leg up in the virtual event planning process. Even still, it is important to reevaluate the content from the lens of a virtual audience. Otherwise, you risk your audience dropping out or becoming distracted in the digital environment.

In-person events often span from several hours to several days. Virtual events are typically a few hours at maximum, as people are unlikely to tune into a daylong livestream. Attention spans are shorter online, and you may find it challenging to determine how to shorten the duration of your sessions. Virtual events often see higher attrition so it's important to expand your initial target group of invitees to achieve your actual attendance goals. When considering your approach to content for a virtual event, there are a few key questions to consider:



Is it relevant? Does your content match up with the interests of your audience? Will your audience be excited to hear from the selected speaker(s)? Is this a critical message you need your audience to receive?

Is it interesting? Will the content keep eyes on your virtual event? Are there lulls in action? Should you include interactive components? If there are activities, do they translate well online? Is there an opportunity to provide any digital resources?

Is it consistent? Should you consider turning your event into a series? Does the messaging match any prior communications with your audience? Does it align with your brand voice?

Is it actionable? What is your call to action for the event? How do you plan to facilitate viewer interaction afterwards?

Delight your audience

When you are planning a virtual event,
you should aim to make your audience feel like they are with you live.

Plan your audience experience

When you have an in-house audience, they need to know the logistics of where to go, what equipment to use, etc. Your online audience deserves the same quality of event they would expect in-person. Think with an audience-first perspective as you plan the content and experience.

Remember, your audience's experience shouldn't end when the event wraps. Consider how you will follow up post-event, including any nurture journeys.

Facilitate two-way conversation

Streaming content is relatively easy. Creating opportunities for engagement online is more challenging.

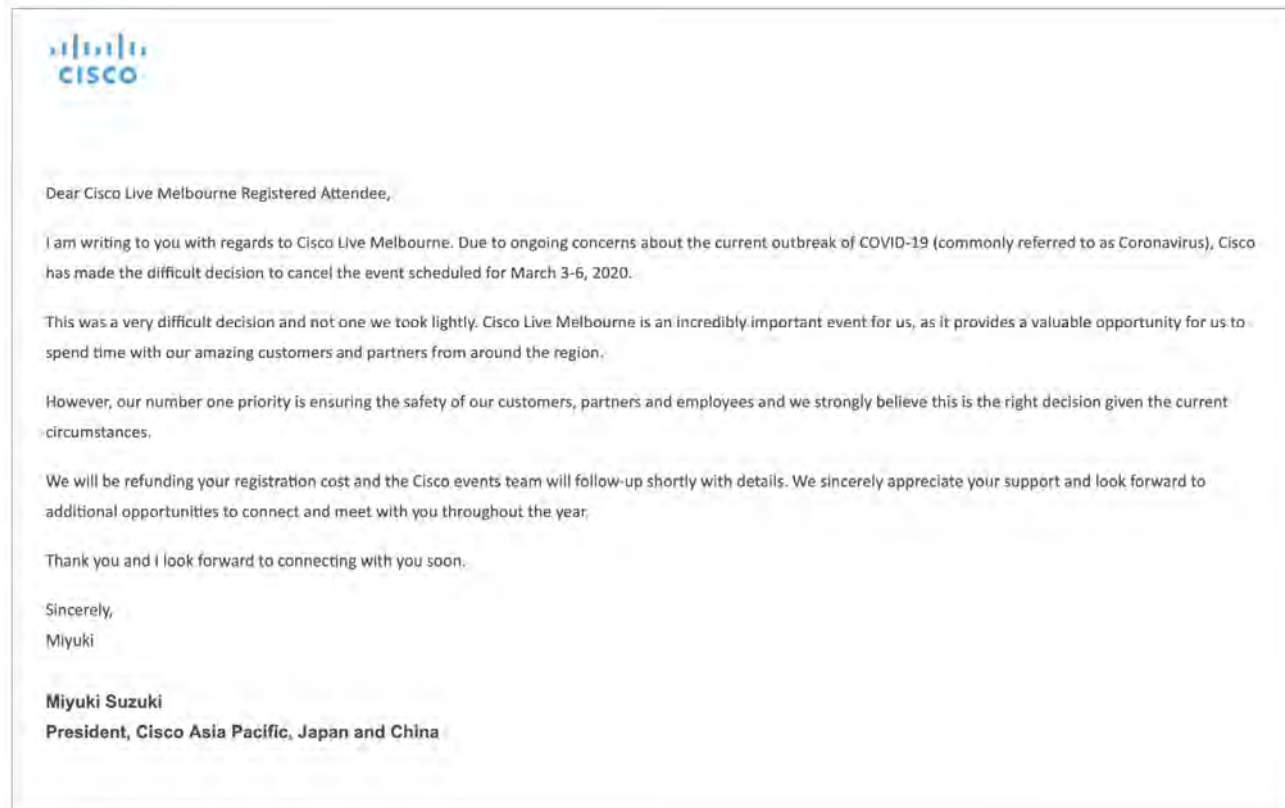
A few fantastic ways to encourage interaction:

- Set up Q&A and chat functionality within your live stream
- Utilize social media to share highlights and encourage live conversation
- Insert live polls and live graphs

Inform your audience

If you had already invited attendees to a physical event that is not going virtual, it is critical that you let your attendees know quickly and considerately.

Sample event change announcement





Planning a Virtual Event

Logistics and Best Practices

How to host online

The competition for online events/trainings is about to get stiff. It's going to be KEY for your content to stand out and engagement to be a priority during your event. Both will help to boost registration, attendance, and follow-up. For more details on developing stream-worthy content and engaging a virtual audience, see the How to Change Live Event to Virtual chapter.

This chapter will provide you a step-by-step guide to setup, run and execute successful online events of any kind.

Event Prep

Set goals; # of registrations / attendees, etc.

Choose your host/collaboration tool.
Try an extended free trial of [Cisco Webex here](#)

Setup a simple registration page

Select your presenters

Build your presentation deck or any on-screen visuals

Create your event promo content; emails, social, web

Event Deployment

Drive traffic to your registration page using social,
email and your website

Immediately after registration provide a registration confirmation and
point to event page with additional details

Send reminder emails about your upcoming event

Host your event (don't forget to test the tools first)

During the event, encourage attendee participation and engagement
and social media sharing to boost brand reach

Sample virtual event checklist

Determine Event Details	Pre-Event Setup	During & Post-Event
6-8 weeks out	4-6 weeks out	1 day after
❑ Define owners/stakeholders ❑ Identify target countries & languages ❑ Develop launch schedule ❑ Define audiences ❑ Finalize live stream instance requirements: ▪ Number of instances ▪ Moderators per instance ❑ Review budget & get approvals	❑ Develop event strategy, touch point strategy, and business rules ❑ Create and localize event content ❑ Create and send invitations	❑ Activate live-stream ❑ Deactivate live-stream ❑ Follow up emails with link to recording ❑ Performance Reporting ▪ Live-stream metrics ▪ Q&A (if applicable) ▪ Email performance

Elements of an event registration page

Event registration pages provide context to potential attendees. This page should give information on the event date and time, purpose, and agenda. Additionally, this page provides you the opportunity to capture any relevant information you may require from your audience, such as email address, company, job title, or country.

The screenshot shows a registration page for the "Americas Marketing Velocity Live Broadcast" by Cisco. The page is framed by a blue border. At the top left is the Cisco logo, and at the top right is a "Contact" link with a speech bubble icon. The main heading is "Americas Marketing Velocity Live Broadcast". Below this, a paragraph invites users to join Cisco executives on April 15, 2020, from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon PST. To the right of this text is a "Register Now" section with a list of required fields: Email Address, First Name, Last Name, Company, and Country. Each field has a red asterisk indicating it is required. The Country field is a dropdown menu currently showing "UNITED STATES". A blue "Submit" button is at the bottom of the registration form. On the left side, under the heading "Agenda", the date and time "April 15, 2020 11:00 a.m. PST Broadcast" are listed. Below this, there are three bullet points detailing the agenda items and speakers.

CISCO

Contact >

Americas Marketing Velocity Live Broadcast

Join Cisco executives on April 15, 2020 from 11:00 a.m.-12:00 noon PST to view impact-driven sessions that will energize and empower you to hone your marketing edge.

Register Now

* required fields

Email Address*

First Name*

Last Name*

Company*

Country*
UNITED STATES

Submit

Agenda

April 15, 2020
11:00 a.m. PST
Broadcast

- Cisco's Growth Marketing Strategy - Presented by Michelle Chiantera, Vice President, Americas Growth Marketing
- Market Your Edge: Why Differentiation is Key for Success - Presented by Boon Lai, Vice President, Global Partner Marketing
- Velocity webinar overview and key Americas updates and award presentations - Presented by Michael Hopfinger, Director, Americas Segments, Industries and Partner Marketing

General best practices

Test everything

The best way to ensure your virtual event runs smoothly is to test the experience. And then test it again. Ensure your equipment works, and that you have backup equipment just in case. Test your audio and video quality. Confirm your internet connection and upload speed by testing your connection. Just like at a live event, something may go wrong with a virtual event. Testing everything reduces that risk, but it is important to have backup plans prepared, just in case.



Prepare your speakers

Even experienced speakers may be unfamiliar with presenting online. Reviewing the following best practices with each presenter in advance of the event is important:

Wardrobe: No tight stripes or patterns, wear something comfortable but professional.

Setting: Ensure your background is clean and professional.

Lighting: Your presenter should sit facing a light source. Speakers who sit with their backs to a window or bright light may appear with an unattractive silhouette. Whenever possible, ask your presenter to sit facing the window, desk lamp or other light sources to ensure their face is well illuminated and clearly visible.

Video and audio: Try a practice run to make sure the presenter is framed nicely and that video and audio are clear. Remind presenters to remain on mute unless they are currently presenting, as typing or other background noises can be very distracting to the audience.



Promoting a Virtual Event

Developing a Communications Plan

Developing a communications plan

Hosting a virtual event often means you can invite many more attendees than an in-person event would allow for. Take advantage of this unique opportunity to expand your audience by strategically approaching your communications plan.

There are three key timeframes you must plan around for a virtual event.

Pre-event: Promote your virtual event to drive attendance

During the event: Generate buzz and interaction around your event

Post-event: Follow up with attendees and feed into a nurture journey

Digital channels your best friend when promoting a virtual event.

The following channels are recommended.

Email: Email is tried and true. Consider sending an invitation directly to your audience base via email.

Your own digital properties: Your website, blogs, and other properties are the perfect place to promote your event.

Social media: Posts on social media can carry an impressive reach.

Personalized invites: Having your sales team send personalized invites is an effective way to encourage the attendance of critical audience members.



Sample virtual event communications timeline

Did you know, virtual events take less time to promote? Why? Because in the digital space, users expect an immediate response. They're online now and want to consume during that time.

4-6 weeks out

Use this time for event prep.

1-3 weeks out

Event promotion and driving registration. If you're hosting an event longer than 90 minutes (example; virtual summit or extended training that leads to certification), consider breaking up the screen-time into two or three-day sessions. For larger events like a virtual summit consider 4-6 weeks of promotion.

1 day after

1 day after the event you want to send a follow up to those that attended and those who missed it (include a replay if you can).

Ongoing

Registrants and attendees should be added to an ongoing nurture journey (via email and social media).

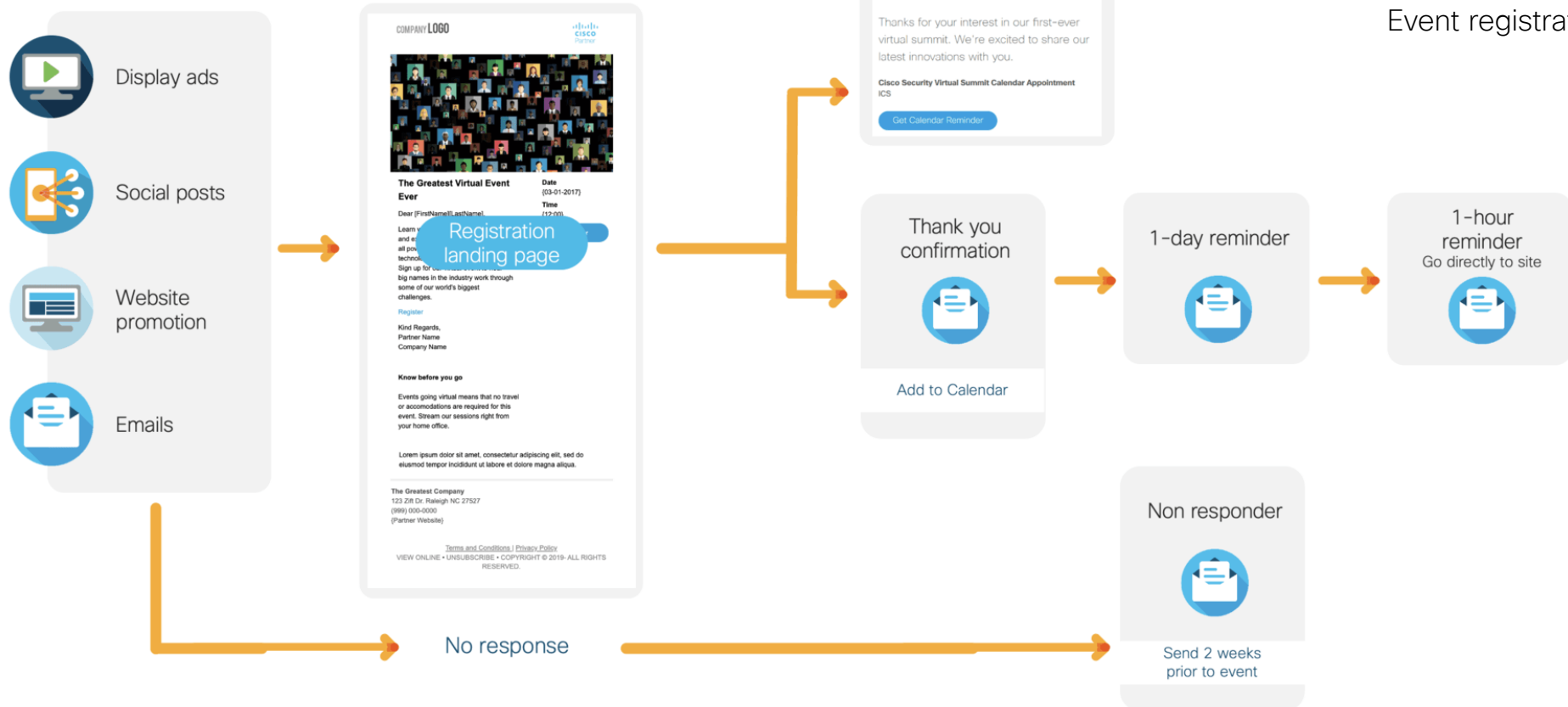
Repeat

Repeat this process for each of your events and trainings.

Sample pre-event journey

Access the [Create Your Own \(CYO\) Virtual Event Kit](#) in Marketing Velocity Central for support with:

Pre-event invite email journeys
Promotional social posts
Banner widgets
Event registration page



Sample during and post-event journey

Access the [Create Your Own \(CYO\) Virtual Event Kit](#) in Marketing Velocity Central for support with:





Post-Event Wrap Up

Measuring Event Success and Following Up

Post-event wrap up

As with all marketing activities, measuring and evaluating your success of a virtual event is imperative to understanding its effectiveness. Fortunately, capturing data from a virtual event is easier than live events which can make the follow-up process a breeze.

Reporting

Metrics, including how many people viewed an entire presentation and how many questions were asked, are hard to pull from live sessions but are readily available with digital events. Understanding viewing stats and engagement scores can help fine tune your content and determine what's resonating with your audience (and what isn't).

Once your event is finished, track your event registrations and attendees along the funnel.

Follow Up Process

Whether you're generating leads or capturing registrations for an event, as soon as the user fills in the form they should be placed in a nurture journey.

Use attendee event data to guide your follow up. Send a "thank you" email to those who attended, and a "missed you" email to those who missed it. If your event included multiple sessions you can further segment your follow up based on session attendance. It is highly recommended to send replays and any additional resources in your follow up outreach.

Consider staying connected outside of email through a call cadence or social networks.



Tools & Resources

Take Action on What You've Learned

Tools & resources

Begin planning your own virtual event today!

Access the [**Create Your Own \(CYO\) Virtual Event**](#) Marketing Velocity Central campaign to execute your event promotional drive-to's and post-event nurture journeys. This kit contains customizable, co-brandable templates including:

- Pre-event invite email journeys
- Promotional social posts
- Banner widgets
- Event registration page
- Post-event nurture journey
- Post-event landing page for event recordings and supporting collateral
- Agency service offerings supporting event execution

Additional resources available to Cisco partners

[Marketing Velocity Learning](#) offers additional training on marketing best practices, including creating video content and the latest digital marketing techniques

[Webex](#)

- [Virtual events with Webex](#)
- [Webex event adoption kit](#)
- [Online Webex support classes](#)

[COVID-19 information for partners](#)

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Discover more marketing training and resources for Cisco partners at cisco.com/go/marketingvelocity

