



**SOLAR&STORAGE  
DIGICON**

# WHAT MARKETING & BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT LEADERS HAVE TO KNOW IN **2021**

A GUIDE TO ORGANIZING VIRTUAL EVENTS  
IN THE RENEWABLE ENERGY INDUSTRY

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# WHAT MARKETING & BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT LEADERS HAVE TO KNOW IN 2021

– A GUIDE TO ORGANIZING VIRTUAL EVENTS IN THE RENEWABLE ENERGY INDUSTRY

In 2020, the event management business was forced to cancel and rethink events. At the same time, renewable energy development and the energy transition have not slo-

wed down. Leading research organizations and associations announce new installation highs in almost every region around the globe.

## New PV Installations in Europe | 2020

Source: EUPD Research 04/2021



To grow their business, companies want to display their innovations, find new business contacts and promote their brand – effectively and safely. Shortly after the first global travel restrictions, web-based seminars were the first choice and alternative to in-person events. Soon after, virtual fairs with interactive booths, chats, conference program and many more features reached the energy industry.

Dedicated to finding alternatives to the use of fossil fuels and harmful emissions, digital marketing formats are a suitable and logical choice. Next to the reduced carbon-footprint, further advantages of the digital trend are savings in cost and time as well as more flexibility. However, one of the most important factors is the change of market penetration. The digital world enables easier access to real-time information, unconstrained

of time zones and geographic location. Therewith, emerging and new markets are easier to address.

At the same time, the multitude of opportunities makes it difficult to differentiate your event from others. This guide will share insights and first-hand experiences from the organizers of the leading virtual market place for the solar PV and energy storage industry.

Starting with the challenges of digitizing events in an industry with a long supply chain and respectively many stakeholders with very different needs, the guide will also address the opportunities of combining these two booming businesses.

## IMPROVE YOUR LEAD QUALITY AT PHYSICAL FAIRS THROUGH A VIRTUAL PRE-EVENT PRESENTATION

### — A SOLAR & STORAGE DIGICON USE CASE

A company wants to present their latest mobile storage solution at one of the largest storage trade fairs globally. To increase the number and quality of the meetings at the fair, the company chooses to organize a virtual product presentation several weeks before the actual fair. The Solar & Storage DigiCon offers the right environment including direct engagement options, making product sheets available for download, a pre-existing registrant base and full support for the event management and communication.

In a 60-minute presentation, the company introduces the product live from the factory, answers

questions and shares a recent use case. After, the attendees have the option to talk to the speakers in a video chat session.

Most of the participants had already planned to visit the trade fair and now organized a meeting directly with the manufacturer and can ask specific questions. The virtual pre-fair event allowed the company to reach a broader audience, inviting visitors and scheduling meetings with potential customers that are already farther ahead in the sales funnel.

# DIGITIZING EVENTS IN THE RENEWABLE ENERGY INDUSTRY – CHALLENGES

Digitalization of large fairs and conferences comes with its own challenges for marketers, event managers, sales personnel and IT. Starting from building the necessary technical infrastructure, training, sourcing possible platforms without experiences to build on, organizing and managing events that don't have the benefit of crowds, reaching the target groups that are typically active "on site" and not online, preparing good content and unforeseen, unknown challenges.

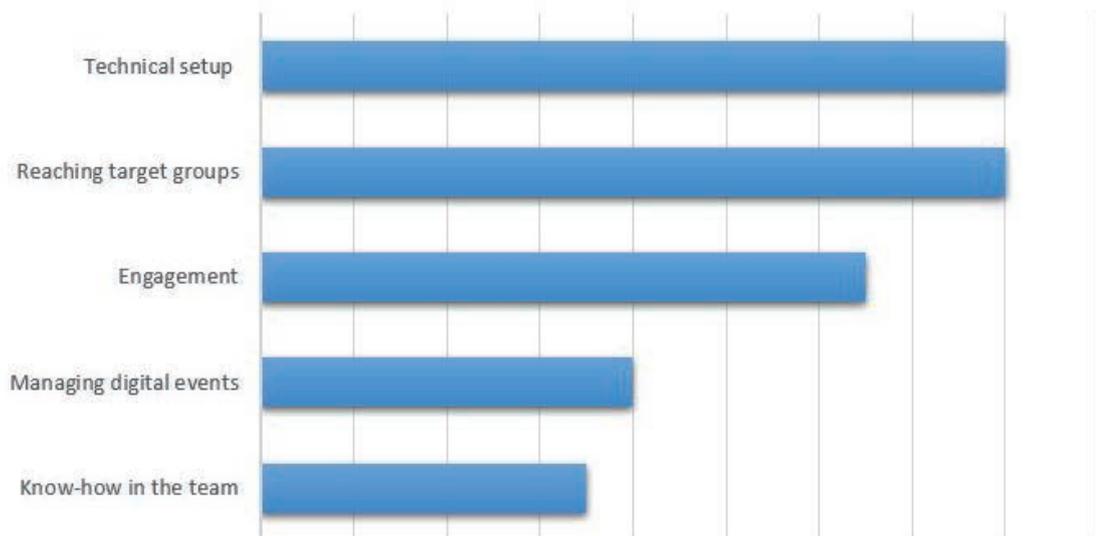
In a survey among marketing and business development managers from the global solar and energy storage industry, the top five chal-

lenges named were technical set-up, reaching target groups, engagement, digital event management and lack of know-how. Indeed, managing an in-person event or a booth at such an event is very different from digital events.

We are taking a closer look at these challenges and are sharing our experiences from one year Solar & Storage DigiCon.

## Top 5 Challenges

Source: Solar & Storage DigiCon, 2020



The top 5 challenges as named by surveyed marketing professionals from the global solar and energy storage industry. (Solar & Storage DigiCon, 2020)

## SET UP

### – GUIDING QUESTIONS

When moving a physical event or trade fair to a virtual environment, the basic requirements are a stable and sufficient internet connection as well as the right provider for the software, i.e. streaming services, virtual trade fair environment, and matchmaking areas. The decision process can be quite difficult as requirements and technical know-how are often missing to fully understand the needs of the new platform. So, here are some guiding questions:

- » What kind of event are you planning? An interactive workshop, a presentation-series, a conference with networking opportunities and breakout rooms, a virtual trade fair?
  - » How many participants do you want to be able to host?
  - » What kind of networking and engagement opportunities are you looking for? Written or video chat, gamification and leaderboard, live surveys?
  - » Who is your target group and how “tech-ready” are they?
  - » What kind of skills do you need to build internally? Html-programming, live streaming, video editing, data analysis?
- » Do you want exhibitors or presenters to manage their stream or content themselves? If not, how many resources do you need to consider ensuring the success of the platform or event?

For the Solar & Storage DigiCon, we had a time frame of 6 weeks and 5 to 6 full-time employees working mostly exclusively on designing and setting up the virtual trade fair and streaming, organizing events, communicating with partners and customers, selling booths and promoting the event. Starting June 1st of 2020, the technicalities of the Solar & Storage DigiCon were very new to us and our exhibitors, so a lot of time was spent on learning and testing as well as training.

Transparency and exchange of lessons learned within the team were crucial components to a timely delivery. On July 15th 2020, the Solar & Storage DigiCon officially launched and has been accessible since then.

# GENERATING LEADS AND BUYERS

## – REACHING CRITICAL TARGET GROUPS



**The success of your event is measured with relevant content that is presented in an accessible way to the participants that will turn into leads and buyers. A high number of participants is not a guarantee for a high conversion of participants into leads.**

The supply chains of solar PV and energy storage include many stakeholder groups. They each require very different approaches of communication. Upstream players such as raw material or manufacturing equipment providers will need to be addressed with a different “story” than manufacturers or even downstream players. Additional hurdles can be language barriers, time zones and identifying what channels the target group uses and is reached with.

When organizing your event, one of the important questions you need to ask yourself is who would you like to have in your audience. This is not only relevant for your own marketing activities, but also for external speakers, sponsors and the content of presentations.

A general rule is that the broader the agenda and non-specific the topics the less sales-relevant the audience will be. This goes to say, that if the general goal of the event is to increase broader brand awareness, such an open theme is the right choice. Communication includes all owned channels, earned channels such as

media partners and paid campaigns. The target group is quite large and the number of attendees will likely be much higher.

An event with a concrete, technical or political topic will require a much more precise communication method and will attract a smaller but higher quality audience. A topic that will offer value for the time spent – learning, valuable product information or critical company development, market briefing, to name just a few examples – will attract a specific target group that are more likely to qualify as leads.

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Broader scope of the event – high-level speakers addressing macro-economic or -political topics – widespread, general communication – Higher number of participants – lower lead quality

▶ Suitable for increasing broad brand awareness and transporting company news

Specific, political or technical topic – knowledgeable speakers – targeted communication – lower number of participants – higher lead quality

▶ Suitable for product launches and product presentations, lead generation

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For a broader communication, you want to choose channels that have a large reach and you are familiar with. The content can be just as broad and inclusive of all stakeholders from the industry all the way to affiliated industries. Exemplary channels are facebook, LinkedIn, Google including sponsored campaigns. Articles or ads on global renewable energy blogs or news sites can also be a suitable method of choice.

For a specific event, you will want to choose a less “loud and proud”-approach but be strategic with the channels. For example, using LinkedIn groups, magazines, direct mailings and promotion directly into the network with posts by the speakers. A suitable alternative is choosing a platform provider that already has a registrant base that matches your target groups.

## BENEFIT OF A HIGH RATE OF RETURNING VISITORS

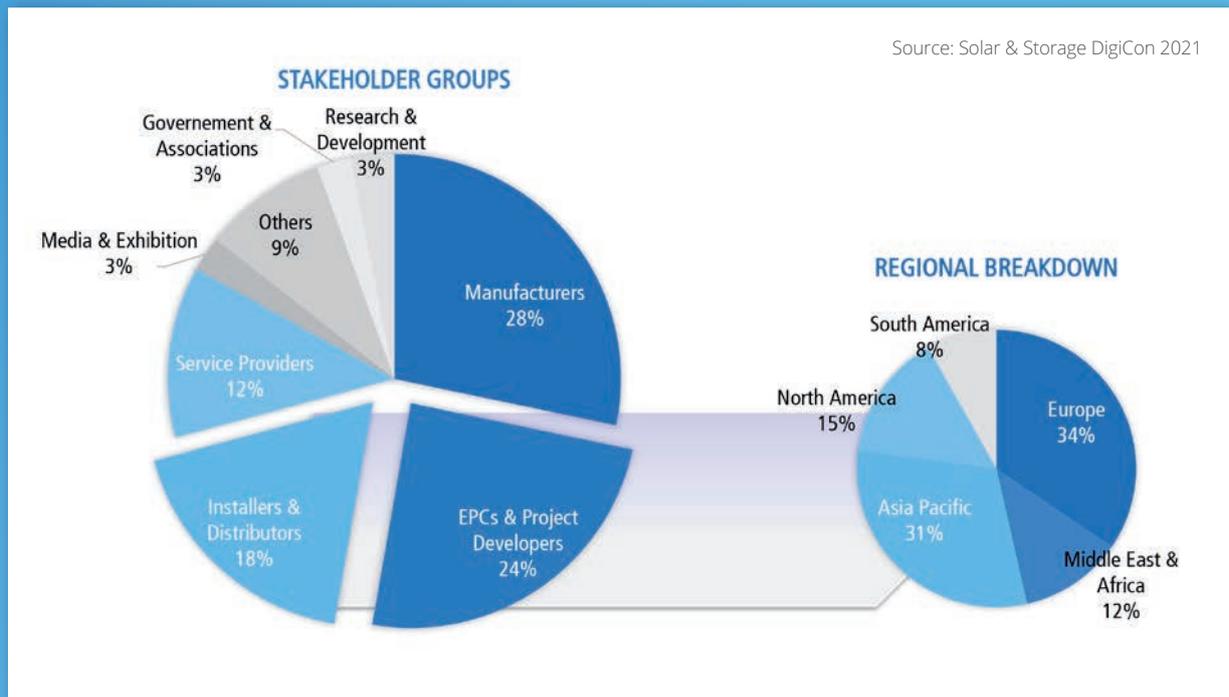
### — A SOLAR & STORAGE DIGICON USE CASE

The main target groups of the Solar & Storage DigiCon are downstream players on a country or regional level. These include EPCs, project developers, distributors and installers. The organizers, JF4S and IBESA already have a large international network of downstream players, specifically in Europe, Middle East and North America, built through organizing content-driven events in the regions for more than 20 years, regular surveys and further activities. To transfer this network onto the Solar & Storage DigiCon, we chose to address the target groups for each event through several different channels:

- » Direct mailing campaign with a personalized invitation and sharing recent content
- » Media partners including the relevant news providers to distribute press releases and include events in their respective listings
- » Issuance of imagery to speakers to share on social media
- » Personal invitation emails to installers in their local language
- » Bi-weekly newsletters to all registrants
- » Social media messaging campaigns reaching the specific target groups on country/ regional level
- » Google Ad and LinkedIn promotional campaigns

The Solar & Storage DigiCon requires only one registration, this in turn means that there is no event-specific registration necessary. The benefit is that all regis-

trants receive regular updates about upcoming events on the platform, a reliable contact base and a high rate of returning visitors.



# ENGAGEMENT IN A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

## – CONTENT IS ROYALTY!



One of the main challenges with digital formats such as virtual conferences or trade fairs is the engagement. Participants sit in front of their screen – something they have been doing for the past year. The frontal, classroom environment is unattractive very quickly. Options such as multi-lingual chat, surveys or polls, an exciting and visually attractive environment are a few ways to capture and maintain the attention of participants. The most relevant aspect however is interesting, relevant content.

During physical conferences and presentations, the majority of listeners will sit through content they do not find interesting, that is too marketing-driven or just not presented well. Standing up during an ongoing presentation, causing disturbance or no alternative activities are just two reasons for participants to stay seated. However, with digital formats, the environment is less restrictive. Attention spans are shorter online and focus strays easily with the open email inbox, available phone and colleagues or family nearby. Highly marketing-driven presentations with no relation to the market, theme or invited audience will see high dropout rates. More than ever, it is crucial to create content-driven and well-prepared presentations.

This is even more relevant as the ideal duration of single, non-interactive presentations is a maximum of 15 to 20 minutes per speaker.

Specific solar market dynamics need to be taken into consideration as well: From a content creation perspective, it is very important to follow a regional approach to attract high quality participation from the downstream segments. With more than 75 LCOE ready solar country markets already (significantly increasing tendency), the global landscape is highly fragmented. **The majority of installers, developers and EPCs are operating on domestic level and can only be successfully attracted with highly specialized and relevant content, which is shaped towards their needs and scope of business. Punchy and country market specific conference sessions therefore enable an enhanced market penetration and attractiveness for target groups, which are highly relevant for the group of suppliers.**

### Digital Culture

There are strong regional differences when it comes to the readiness of interacting in a digital environment.

Participants from the Americas, Middle East and Australia are more accepting of new technologies, public chats and surveys as participants from Europe, especially Germany. This is particularly visible in the chat activity.

We collected some important guidelines that will keep your audience engaged. As an organizer, share these guidelines with your invited speakers in a briefing to ensure that your invited audience will want to return.

**(1) Know the market or topic**

– When invited to contribute to a virtual conference or workshop as a speaker, make sure you are familiar with the market drivers, dynamics and latest trends, as well as the topic, for example battery recycling.

**(2) Know your audience**

– Ask the organizer about their target groups and share who you would like to have in the audience. Adjust your content accordingly and address central opportunities or challenges, latest market developments or regulations influencing their daily business.

**(3) Know your strengths and values**

– These will then guide the topic you choose. Once you know which market or topic the conference addresses, who is in the audience you can identify how your products or services offer a solution or advancement.

**(4) Stick to one topic**

– Focus your presentation on one particular topic and do not try to squeeze your entire portfolio into the time given.

**(5) Keep visuals simple**

– This is quite basic and obvious but relevant. The screen sizes and resolutions vary and often times the streams are not viewed in full-screen mode. An instable internet connection can also compromise the quality of the visuals. Avoid overloading the slides. The text and charts should be large enough.

**(6) Ensure a good technical setup**

– If available, organize a test-run so you can check the camera and microphone settings, and demonstrate / learn about the features of the platform and livestreaming. In general, choose a quiet setting with natural lighting, a good quality microphone and camera.

**(7) Be approachable**

– Don't be afraid of sharing opinions, your vision and experiences with the audience. Where a handshake and face-to-face exchange is not possible, you increase interest in your person and product by being honest, relatable and, most importantly, available.

**(8) Take the first step**

– Be proactive and let your audience know that they are welcome to get in touch with you on social media. If there is a chat, leave a public message that you are available after the presentation.

**„But, I still want to market my products!“** And you shall! Limit the obviously promotional content to no more than one third of your presentation slides. Much rather, find a good story line to coat the promotional content. For example, peak your content with the product. This means, that you pre-

sent a topic that focuses on market regulations, challenges of downstream players or technological advancements, analyze the situation, share experiences and then finish the presentation with your product or service that offers a solution to the described challenge.

## KEEP YOUR EVENT PROGRAMS CONTENT-RICH

### — A SOLAR & STORAGE DIGICON USE CASE

At the Solar & Storage DigiCon, we focus on content that is market specific, so occupies the national downstream segment, end customers or manufacturers. In 2021, we started with a virtual European Roadshow with conferences on this year's most relevant solar markets in Europe; Italy, Spain, Poland, Netherlands and Germany.

To keep the conference programs content-rich, we start the day off with market insights presented by our partners EUPD Research, known for their installer surveys and the Top Brand PV seal.

The speakers we choose are active in the respective country or region. As organizers, we ensure relevant content by our guest speakers by offering both guidance, support as well as content consultancy. Promotional content is limited to 3 slides.

## TO BE DIGITAL IS A NECESSITY AND WORTH IT IN THE RENEWABLE ENERGY BUSINESS

After presenting some of the main challenges of organizing digital events, it is time to look at the benefits. Apart from reduced carbon footprints and cost savings, digital events enable you to:

- » reach your target group much more purposeful
- » expand your business to new and emerging markets
- » connect with people you have never met otherwise
- » inform leads, buyers and existing customers with one tool
- » react on short-term notice to actual developments in the industry
- » invite an audience on a short-term notice
- » be well prepared for booth visits/'real' events or meetings

The forced and sudden digitalization need within the COVID-19 era has brought the renewable energy industries closer together. Virtual shows, conferences and meetings are undoubtedly a very valuable addition to the "conventional" life we had known beforehand.

Nevertheless, it is all about intensity and diversity as digital solutions are no panacea – the right depth of implementation with managed expectations are of utmost importance. **Digital platforms, particularly Solar & Storage DigiCon, have successfully underscored their right to exist and will perfectly continue its operations and value creation in a post-COVID world alongside major international trade shows.**

## REVISING THE SOLAR & STORAGE DIGICON

### — ACTING ON LESSON'S LEARNED

Together with our exhibitors, partners and visitors, we have made many experiences in the field of digital events and marketing. As the energy transition continues to develop, so does the Solar & Storage DigiCon.

In summer 2021, the Solar & Storage DigiCon will present itself in an advanced format to meet the changing demands and offer a sustainable space for the industry to digitally market their products, access information and virtually connect.

The revised platform offers a conference room, market data center, personal profile area with matchmaking opportunities and

career hub where partner companies can post vacancies and connect with new talents. The auditorium offers new features, such as video calls and direct contact to the speakers, download of data sheets and appointment setting. In the resource center, you can filter for recordings, data sheets and presentations in a library updated with new content from the global industry on a weekly basis.

To activate your three-month free trial, enter the code **SSDC2.0** once registration is open in summer 2021.

## ABOUT US

### SOLAR & STORAGE DIGICON

#### **Solar & Storage DigiCon**

The Solar & Storage DigiCon is the leading virtual marketplace with conference program for the global solar and energy storage industries that combines international knowledge exchange through micro-conferences and limitless networking opportunities with industry peers in a unique digital environment.

Founded in mid-2020 by two leading global networking organizations International Battery & Energy Storage Alliance (IBESA) and Joint Forces for Solar Initiative (JF4S), the marketplace has grown to be the No. #1 digital platform with over 80,000 visits and 10,500 conference delegates so far. In summer 2021, the Solar & Storage DigiCon will present itself in a new, fresh look, with substantially improved features to offer the ideal space for the solar PV and energy storage industry to do business.

[www.solarstorage-digicon.com](http://www.solarstorage-digicon.com)

#### **International Battery & Energy Storage Alliance (IBESA)**

The International Battery and Energy Storage Alliance IBESA is the first global network of excellence in the field of battery and energy storage. Our goal is to strengthen storage companies in their performances and their efficiency in international competition.

[www.ibesalliance.org/](http://www.ibesalliance.org/)

#### **Joint Forces for Solar (JF4S)**

JF4S is a global synergy of solar stakeholders ranging from multinational corporations to industry associations and local installation companies who collaborate in the mission to expand the use of solar technologies at the global, regional and local level and establish a vibrant renewable and clean energy industry. Founded in 2009, the JF4S have grown to be the leading global business and knowledge platform and enabler. Partners benefit from comprehensive support to maximize their brand visibility, connect with other stakeholders and further develop solar energy on a local and international level.

[www.jointforces4solar.com/](http://www.jointforces4solar.com/)

Our main objective is to provide a high quality support and service system for our partners. To achieve that, we provide insightful facts and figures for decision makers, offer a broad spectrum of support in increasing publicity, and supply partners with input into new market trends and development for appropriate business strategies.

**Stay in touch and up to date by connecting with us on LinkedIn!**

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- » Present your products, services, innovations in a smart way, generate new leads and stay in contact with your target audiences.

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