

# How to Create a Virtual Dining Experience

With mandatory closures, many restaurateurs and chefs are turning to virtual channels to continue to engage with their guests. From cooking & mixology classes to happy hours & brunches, virtual events can be great ways to stay connected with customers and build additional revenue channels.

## Why a Virtual Event?

Virtual events can be more than just a fun experiment, and become an integral part of your customer relationship or business model. There are three main reasons why you may want to consider virtual events.

### Brand awareness & marketing

Virtual events are an excellent way (now but also in the future) to increase your brand awareness and market your restaurant. By hosting a cooking class, educational wine seminar, or other event of your design, can help customers discover or deepen their relationship with you via a new channel.

### Develop new revenue streams

Virtual events expand the ways you are able to offer experiences and engage with your customers, giving you the opportunity to develop new revenue streams. Positioned the right way, customers may be willing to pay for the event experience itself. You can also increase sales of your food product in a focused way by selling food and drink DIY Kits that are paired with your virtual events.

### Increase Sales

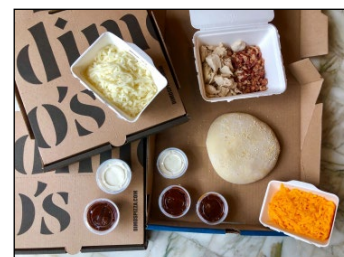
Virtual events are an excellent way to have you become top of mind and to give someone a reason to buy something from you. By hosting a cooking demo that showcases items from your menu/ weekly specials, you can simply remind customers to order from you again (or try for the first time). Demo's can often also be a good way to introduce them to new items featured on your menu. Feel free to offer a discount coupon to further help encourage the "in the moment" sale.



[Frontera Grill's Rick Bayless](#) hosts daily cooking livestreams.



[Rhine Halls Distillery](#) has paid, spirit-education focused classes on Saturdays.



[Dimo's Pizza](#) is doing a pizza making class and selling DIY kits for it.

# How to Host an Event

Once you identify your “why”, you are ready to dive-in! But there are few more decisions you’ll have to make before going full steam with marketing and execution. Follow these steps:

## 1 Decide on your objective

You’ll first want to refine your “why” into a more specific objective. This should include a specific goal associated with the “why” as well as who you are targeting and what you are hoping to gain from the audience. There are three specific areas to consider:

### Current vs. New Customers

Do you want to reach new customers or engage with your current customer base? Consider a personalized experience or more intimate experience for current customers, and an introductory experience for customers new to your brand.

### Transactional vs. Relationship Development

If you are trying to sell items or an experience now, try pairing the virtual experience with pick-up or delivery kits. If you are aiming to deepen relationships for brand awareness and future on-premise engagement, consider offering special events for those on your email list or those following you

### Charge vs. Free

Does it make sense for you to charge for the event? Are you trying to make revenue off this specific format or redirecting participants back to your current operations? If you’re trying to amplify your brand, consider a live streaming service for free. If the event is aimed to offer a personalized experience for customers, that may be worth pay for.

## 2 Decide what type of event to do

Next you’ll decide on an event type and the specific content. What you select will depend on your object and also the nature of your business. There are four common types of events to consider:

### Cooking & Mixology Classes

Teach how to make something from your menu. The content of this experience may change based on if your objective is to sell something

### Educational Events

Education about wine, food, spirits, etc. (anything other than the cooking/preparation process)



[Ina Mae’s Tavern Cooking Classes](#)



[Foxtrot Wine Tasting](#)

## Virtual Happy Hours & Brunches

Creating a place for people to socialize with each other around a common topic or point of interest. You can have a guest speaker or just create a space for socialization.

## Kids Classes

Basically anything to distract the kids...PLEASE! (Checkout [Kellan's Kitchen for Kid's](#) focused classes)

### 3 Select Host(s) and Content Topic

Once you've got these decisions down you need a host and topic! Will this be chef-hosted with a moderator? Or is it a one-woman show? What are you cooking, teaching, or talking about with the audience? Regardless of who it is, they should remember that your audience needs context, and they're there to interact, so that may mean being able to answer questions coming through Q&A channels or live questions.

### 4 Identify Appropriate Platform

Almost there. Lastly you need to pick the right platform. Your options are more limited here and each has specific pluses or minuses. In general, your options include:

#### For open, free events

Instagram or Facebook Live Stream: Great for an open event as anyone on Instagram who can find you can join. This is also very easy to use and you can receive/respond to comments. Although it is harder to capture participant information for future marketing purposes, these come with a built-in marketing channel to your followers before the event.

#### For controlled and/or paid events:

Zoom: For a more controlled event or one with inter-group interaction, Zoom is an excellent choice. You can limit who joins via specific link and password, and participants can see and engage with each other. This is a great platform to use for paid events and you can use Eventbrite.

Webinar: Halfway between a Zoom and Instagram, this provides a mechanism for communication between a host and an audience. You have more control over who joins than with Instagram Live and more control how your audience can (or cannot) interact with each other.



[Belinda Chang Boozy Brunch](#)



[Delish Parent & Kid Cooking Class](#)

## 5 Market

Now let's get the word out there! It's time to market your event which can be daunting in a currently crowded digital space. The good news is that people are glued to social media so Instagram and Facebook are excellent first options, especially if you already have a lot of followers. You can also leverage your website and existing mailing lists to announce your virtual events. Next, you'll want to consider partnering with brands or others who might have existing audiences you can tap. And if it's financially feasible, you can explore paid ads on Google or Facebook as well.

## 6 Execute

Finally... it's time! To execute, make sure you develop a detailed run-of-show that specifies all the logistics that need to happen. You'll want to assign roles for managing the technology, for the host and any moderators, and make sure you have any prep work completed with food or drink products. And if you are doing this for the first time, make sure to PRACTICE first. After you are done, you can keep videos up on Facebook or Youtube for others to access in the future!

**Interested in doing Virtual Events but need some help?  
Visit [www.virtualdiningchicago.com](http://www.virtualdiningchicago.com) for more detail on how  
to work with them Or contact [disha@herehereapp.com](mailto:disha@herehereapp.com).**