

How to do Virtual Book Launch Successfully: Lessons from the Launch of “Be A Change Agent: Leadership in a Time of Exponential Change”.

There isn't a lot of comprehensive materials out there on how to do a successful virtual book launch. I had a virtual launch for my book “Be A Change Agent: Leadership in a Time of Exponential Change” on February 6, 2021. I am sharing my experience and lessons learnt here, hoping that it will be useful for anyone that is planning to organize a virtual book launch. This post is especially useful for self-published non-fiction authors who are looking for a jump-start. I'll keep it straight-to-the-point.

BEFORE THE VIRTUAL BOOK LAUNCH

Organizing a virtual book launch is mostly about planning before the day. The event will turn out well if it is thought through properly. Here are items that you should consider before the day.

1. Set a date and time that works for a large number of people in your network. If you are not already a celebrity whose fans will cancel their appointments in order to attend your book launch, you need to set up a date and time that would likely work for the majority of people you are connected with. In the case of “Be A Change Agent”, the launch was held on a Saturday at 1 pm Central Standard Time (CST). Saturday was okay for me as most people in my network are busy professionals. The 1 pm CST timing allowed people from different time zones to attend, including those in the pacific zone and those in the GMT zone.
2. Create a formal event invite and allow people to formally sign up to attend. Do not make an assumption that people will automatically attend your virtual book launch just because you announced it on social media. You need to receive a form of commitment from potential attendees in the form of an RSVP. There are online tools to help in creating a successful invite. I used Eventbrite and I was able to track the number of people that registered. I had an idea of how large the event would be before the day. Eventbrite is not the only tool out there. You can search for others. In fact, your invite may be as simple as a form on your website. My experience was that 20% of those that clicked on my Eventbrite page accepted the invite while 80% of those that accepted the invite actually showed up. I started posting my invite online three weeks to the event day. I also sent personal invites through email and text messages, and I made some phone calls.
3. Select a suitable online platform. There is no perfect online platform to use for a virtual book launch. You may host it on Zoom, Webex, Team or others. You may decide to do Facebook live, Instagram or Youtube, or a combination. What is mostly important is that you are able to set up the event and that you are comfortable with whatever platform you have selected. In my case, I invited all attendees into a Zoom call. The event was recorded but we did not stream live on any media. This allowed me to properly edit the video before posting on my website and social media. You may choose to broadcast live – it is just a matter of choice. One thing you may need to be aware of is that some of the online platforms have maximum capacities. For example, you may need to upgrade your Zoom account to host a large meeting if you have more than 100 people sign up for your event.
4. Set up an event planning team. You shouldn't work alone – get help from those close to you. Your team could be as small as two or as large as 10, depending on what you need to do. In my

case, I had four people on my event planning team. The team consisted of my event anchor / Emcee, a technology savvy family member, another family member that handled logistics and myself. We had a few meetings prior to the event to decide what we wanted the day to look like. We planned all the items 1-3 above, developed an agenda, tested all equipment and did a mini dry-run of the event before the day. I suggest that you do not handle everything alone. Get, at least, one more person to join you in planning for the day.

5. Send out event reminders. If you sent out your event invite weeks before the event, you may find that many people will register immediately, after which the rate of registration will decline with time. In order to gather as many people as possible to register, you may need to post the invite a few more times – at least a week to the event and a few days to the event. You will find that people will keep registering until an hour to the event start.
6. Follow up with invitees. If you are using Eventbrite, you will have opportunities to send follow up emails to those who accepted the invite as an email blast. This email may include links to joining the event and any other information you would like to pass across. Ensure that you send this follow up message a couple of days to the event and about an hour to the start. Those who did not put the event in their calendars would still join if they are reminded and if they do not need to scroll through hundreds of emails to find your link.
7. Get an event anchor / Emcee. I did mention above that my Emcee was a member of the planning team. My Emcee is a very talented events host and events professional, who also happens to be a close friend of mine. You too may look for someone within your network or family that can act as an anchor. You may hire an Emcee if you can but you can also save a lot of money if someone close is willing to lend a helping hand. Nevertheless, it is not ideal to host your book launch event by yourself – let someone else be the anchor. The anchor is the event host, who will also manage all the transitions between items on your event agenda.
8. Plan your appearance and staging. Remember that it is your book launch and you need to keep the image and message of your book in the minds of your attendees. Although it is virtual, you still need to plan and set up a successful background. Some may decide to use pre-designed graphics while others will prefer a real background. In my case, my background was real. I sat on a couch, close to a fireplace, with a coffee table on which I visibly displayed my books. I decided for that staging because I thought it was unusual and stood out. My Emcee used a graphic background with the book largely displayed. If you like, you may use props in the background. For example, a banner displaying your book – but remember it may cost you some money. Another part of your appearance is your dressing. You may want to dress in a manner that is consistent with your book. In my case, I wrote a business non-fiction book, so I dressed in business casual but my jacket still had a party style to it.
9. Get all equipment ready. Ensure that you get all equipment – computers, cameras, phones, tripod stands, cables and chargers, displays, etc, ready before the event. In my case, I logged into the event using two devices. I had the main camera directed to me in the position that I liked to appear, while I had a computer (not visible to the main camera) beside me through which I monitored what was going on, saw the chats and saw the attendees. The computer was kept mute, video off and volume turned to zero throughout the event.

AT THE VIRTUAL BOOK LAUNCH

Here, I will run through the agenda that we used during the virtual launch of “Be A Change Agent”. Remember that this is how I did mine. Yours may be different. I just want to share what I did. Here is how it went.

1. Welcome: This is the beginning of the event, handled by the Emcee. During the welcome, your team will keep admitting attendees into the event. The Emcee can scroll through the attendees list and mention names of people as they get into the virtual room. The Emcee may ask people to type where they are joining from and announce the locations. Lastly, the Emcee can make a big welcome announcement and discuss housekeeping items, including the agenda. The Emcee should have a host right for the event and spotlight whoever he wants, but largely manage the event in the speaker mode (if on Zoom for example)
2. Emcee’s Introduction & Author’s Bio: This is where the Emcee introduces everyone to the purpose of the gathering. The Emcee can read the author’s bio and then introduce the author to take over the virtual floor.
3. Author’s Opening Remarks: Your opening remarks should be kept simple – just general greetings, leading into the next item, which is the purpose of the book.
4. The Purpose of the Book: Take about 10 minutes to discuss the purpose of your book. Let this be a prepared speech that is well-thought-through but let it flow naturally. Remember that this is part of your first appearance at the book launch. Those present and those who would watch the event thereafter would see this before the rest of the event. This shouldn’t be a sales pitch but a snapshot or nugget about why the book was written. Be passionate. Be real. Be authentic.
5. Keynote Address: Ahead of the event, you could invite someone who knows the subject of your book do a 10-minute keynote address. Ideally, the keynote speaker should have read your book and be willing to build on your initial speech on the purpose of the book. Having a keynote from someone respected in the field that you have written in could earn you additional respect with the audience. In my case, the 10-minute keynote address was presented by a contributor – the Foreword writer.
6. Book Reading: You may read your favorite section of the book, especially one that is central to the theme of the book. I will suggest that you do not use the introduction or conclusion. Choose a section in one of the chapters and read for about five minutes. You may be surprised how your audience would receive this.
7. Comments from “Sneakers” and readers: Invite people who have had the privilege to read your book before the book launch to make comments about your book. The “sneakers’ may be people who helped to review your book. In my case, the “sneakers” were the eight people on the back cover of my book who read the book before publishing and wrote advance praise about the book.
8. Live Book Buying: Provide an opportunity for your attendees to buy your book live. Before the launch day, make sure that the book is available for purchase from various online platforms. I am sure that you know that Amazon is your major book partner. In the chat area, let a member of your team post all the channels through which your book is available for purchase and let people take off and buy live from those sites. The Emcee can announce that anyone that buys live can post in the chat area, then announce the purchases. We did this at my book launch and it was fabulous. I also partnered with a local online bookstore where I have a consignment

agreement. The local bookstore was able to sell autographed copies to those in my city. The store took the orders, supplied me autograph information and received the autographed copies for distribution directly from me. The Emcee should remind your live book buyers to write book reviews for you on the various platforms where they have purchased, especially Amazon.

9. Questions for the Author: This is one of the most important parts of your virtual book launch, which can go concurrently with the live book buying. Allow attendees to ask you questions about the book. You may ask them to post questions in the chat area or raise hands to ask by coming on the camera, depending on the size of your audience. This Q&A session is a major showcase of your book. Prepare for it.
10. Acknowledgements: You may do this whichever way works for you, but ensure that you acknowledge everyone. In my case, we had about 90 attendees in the room. I was able to read through all the names in less than 5 minutes. I also appreciated specific people in my life who helped me through the writing of the book and in other areas of my career.
11. Door Prizes: You may spice up the event with door prizes. A door prize could be whatever you make it – free copies of your book, cash prizes (e.g. gift card), access to resources, etc. In the case of “Be A Change Agent”, four questions were asked for the door prize of \$20 Amazon gift card each.
12. Chat Room: The Emcee can officially end the event but keep the platform open for people to socialize. You may be surprised that some people – family, friends, colleagues and associates – that haven’t met or communicated in a long time would meet at your virtual book launch. Some people who haven’t been in touch with you for years may also be present. Provide an opportunity to reconnect and socialize, while the official event is over.

AFTER THE VIRTUAL BOOK LAUNCH

After the event, remember to reconnect with your attendees. This is part of why you need them to officially register for the event – you will have their contact information. Send messages to thank them for attending your book launch and for the support that you received from them during the event. Send them the link to the recorded event if available – they will help you to share and spread the news. If possible you may conduct a short survey on the event. About 4 questions that can be answered in less than one minute is enough. You can use google forms.

If you would like to watch the virtual book launch of “Be A Change Agent: Leadership in a Time of Exponential Change”, kindly click here <https://www.deleola.com/events.html>

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