Zoom Hybrid Programs and Other Ways
Libraries Can Increase Zoom Attendance
by
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If you're happy with your current Zoom attendance, you probably don't need this column. But if you've seen attendance at your library declining, or are looking for ways to reach even more people, here are some observations we've had after our first full-year of Zoom programing.

With more than 40 years of experience in *Antiques*, *Collectibles*, and *Home Downsizing*, prior to the Covid pandemic we had been performing in-person programs for libraries and other groups within one-hour of our home in Doylestown PA. Then Covid hit and most in-person programs stopped. In October 2020 my wife Sue and I began to transition our *In-Person* programs to *Zoom* and over the next year we booked more than 200 Library Zoom Programs … in 24 states. We're unaware of any other presenter having this extensive experience with Zoom library programs over such a wide national area.

Offering weekday, evening, and weekend programs, we've attracted as many as 110 participants, and as few as one person. Why this disparity in numbers, for the same programs? The most common response we hear from librarians is "***Zoom Burnout***".

And while there is definitely some truth to this, we feel that this isn't the only reason Zoom attendance has been declining at some libraries. In our opinion, here are ten ways libraries can attract more people to their Zoom programs.

1) **Speaker & Program Interest**: If people are interested in the speaker or program, they're more likely to attend. Zoom enables libraries to schedule a much more diverse assortment of quality programming, from literally anywhere in the country. And at basically the same honorarium as local speakers.

2) **Past Zoom Experience**: If participants had a positive experience with a previous Zoom program, they'll mostly likely attend another. If not, they'll probably pass. A positive early experience is extremely important to long-term Zoom success.

3) **Time of the Year**: In northern climates, Zoom seems to work better in the winter/colder months. In hotter climates, Zoom offers a great alternative to leaving the summer air-conditioning.

4) **Program-Day Weather**: People are more likely to attend Zoom programs on days having inclement weather when they prefer not to venture outside in the snow, cold, extreme heat, rain, or ice. Attendance often (but not always) drops on beautiful, sunny days. We attracted one of our larger audiences while 7" of snow was falling outside the library. Yet at times we've attracted a full house on beautiful

days as well. While you can't accurately predict program-day weather when you schedule months in advance, you can play the seasons to make more educated weather guesses about *In-Person* vs. *Zoom* programing interest.

5) **Library Marketing & Promotion**: This is key to program success and some libraries have more experience and expertise in program-promotion than others. The more marketing tools implemented, usually the better the attendance. Some of the various promotions we've seen include:
   - Flyers, Cards & Brochures in the Lobby
   - Library Bulletin Boards Postings
   - Master Library Events Calendar … Online and Elsewhere
   - Local Newspaper Press Releases
   - Weekly or Periodic Library Program emails to program-oriented individuals
   - Program-Reminder emails on day-of or day-prior to the Zoom program
   - Upcoming Program PowerPoint Slide Feeds inside the library
   - Creating *Library Program/Speaker Series* to cross-promote programs
   - Cross-promoting programs between system libraries.
   - Partnering with another nearby library, which not only reduces individual library cost, but also doubles the promotional effort.

6) **Computer Hardware & Accessories**: Zoom works best when the user has the appropriate computer, camera, and speakers … and the knowledge of how to use them. iPhones and iPads can work, but usually not as well. Vintage computers and operating systems often don't work well with Zoom. *Hybrid Programs* (#10 below) can help to resolve this.

7) **Internet & Computer Technical Ability**: Many have sufficient experience to deal with Zoom on their own; some need support to get them through their earliest Zoom experiences. Some libraries have put checklists together to help new attendees through their first few programs. *Hybrid Programs* can also help to over-come this.

8) **Internet Connectivity**: While Internet connectivity is not a problem in most areas, there are still some areas where connectivity is spotty and not available to all library users. *Hybrid Programs* can help to resolve this as well.

9) **Library Commitment to Zoom**: Most libraries are committed to making Zoom work, with some even running hands-on programs showing participants how to use Zoom at home. Others were less committed to it. We once worked with a librarian from a smaller community who simply didn't understand it and opted not to offer something to her local community that she didn't understand herself.

10) **Hybrid Programs**: One great trend we're starting to see is the "*Zoom Hybrid Program*". This is where libraries offer Zoom Programs to both *In-Person* and *Stay-*

at-Home participants. Participants who prefer to get out of the house and attend *In-Person*, or those who need technical support, can attend the program inside the library and watch the program via a projector & screen. At the same time, those unable to travel, and those preferring to log-in from home, can participate via the Zoom link as well. For many libraries, this approach offers the best of both worlds.

In summary, we've seen both advantages and disadvantages to Zoom.

Disadvantages of Zoom
- Nothing is as good as an *In-Person* Program and Speaker.
- Some programs transition to Zoom better than others.
- Zoom offers little social interaction, which is important to many, especially those who miss getting out of the house.
- Visiting the library for an *In-Person* program also offers the opportunity to pick-up or drop-off materials.

Advantages of Zoom:
- Zoom can bring in speakers and topics not otherwise available to the library due to distance and expense factors.
- Zoom reduces the impact of weather.
- Zoom offers unlimited seating, which can be a plus for smaller libraries having limited seating.
- Zoom offers the option of both *Zoom-Only* and *Hybrid Zoom* Programs.

Either way, Zoom is probably not going away any time soon. If ever. If your library is experiencing "*Zoom Burnout*", maybe you might want to take another look and see if there are ways you can rejuvenate interest in your programs. And if you have successfully used anything else that we've not covered here, please share it with us at: info@michaelivankovich.com

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