



## Using Swag to Bring a 'Physical Dimension' to Virtual Events

During the pandemic, swag is playing a bigger role in the events space, helping organizers create tangible connections with virtual audiences — and provide 'a bit of joy.'

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Swag stands for Stuff We All Get — which is no longer true now that most events continue to take place online. Swag, which used to be taken for granted as a convention staple, has taken on fresh value as a physical means to enhance a virtual event experience.

"You can connect people and ignite something meaningful with tangible swag that relates to the event or company message," Andrew Witkin, CEO of custom merchandise company StickerYou, told *Convene*. We recently spoke with Witkin and the leaders of two other organizations about how swag can deliver more of an impact for virtual event attendees than when it was a convention and trade-show staple.



Packed With Purpose's For The Virtual Conference box, like its other gifts sets, is filled with goodies sourced from socially conscious purveyors.

### Packed With Purpose

Prior to COVID-19, corporate gifting company Packed With Purpose (<https://packedwithpurposegifts/>) supplied events with swag bags or boxes curated with items sourced from the host city that reflected the event organization's own socially conscious interests. Packed With Purpose works with purveyors that are minority-owned, women-owned, B-corp, and BIPOC companies.

When the pandemic began shutting down in-person events earlier this year, the Chicago-based company dealt with some event-related canceled orders, Packed With Purpose CEO Leeatt Rothschild said, but quickly found new recipients for its boxes. Because these host organizations and companies couldn't meet in person, they began ordering gift boxes for their clients and for employees who suddenly were working from home.

"They are sending gifts to create a community with their clients and partners and to simulate connection and activity despite not being physically connected," Rothschild told *Convene* earlier this year.

As pandemic restrictions wore on throughout the year and more meetings converted to online only, Rothschild made another addition to the company's offerings: gift boxes specifically curated for virtual events and conferences. Two recent ones are For The Virtual Conference

(<https://shop.packedwithpurposegifts/collections/all-gifts/products/for-the-virtual-conference?variant-32283875082300>), which includes an enamel mug with a coffee and tea pairing, a softcover notebook, a brownie, and a healthy fruit strip snack; and a customizable [Virtual Swag Bag](https://shop.packedwithpurposegifts/products/virtual-swig-bag?variant-32283823833148) (<https://shop.packedwithpurposegifts/products/virtual-swig-bag?variant-32283823833148>), filled with individually packaged snacks, premium coffee and tea, and a marbled stoneware mug branded with a company logo.

"Event organizers have to find new ways to engage, particularly as Zoom fatigue increases," Rothschild said in a release. "Our new gifts are curated specifically to help business leaders get the most out of their virtual conferences." Moreover, they carry on the company's mission to support organizations that contribute to social justice, job training, economic opportunities, and sustainability efforts.



StickerYou creates custom stickers, decals, and labels that organizations put on products included in virtual events boxes and swag bags.

## StickerYou

[StickerYou](https://www.stickeryou.com/) (<https://www.stickeryou.com/>) is a Toronto-based company that creates custom stickers, labels, decals, iron-ons, temporary tattoos, magnets, and more. The company launched in 2008 to provide brands, expo booths, and events with personalized merchandise to distribute to employees, clients, and attendees. Since the pandemic began, however, CEO Witkin said the products are being used in new ways — such as included in swag packages sent out to coincide with virtual events.

"Obviously people have adopted Zoom and different technology to allow [meetings] to happen," Witkin said, "but I think the void that people all felt was just that it wasn't as personal, wasn't as human, as [physical] contact. So you're left with, well, how do we solve that problem?"

Early in the pandemic, StickerYou received orders from companies looking to keep newly remote employees motivated — "company culture boxes that would be sent to the staff," he said, that included StickerYou products with encouraging messages. Now, as so many in-person events have transformed into virtual events, more organizations have adopted the idea to send similar items to attendees.

"We had a couple of events order temporary tattoos that they sent to everybody with different statements on them," Witkin said. "People put them on their hands or their head when the meeting was going to happen, and everyone had their own expression to share. It was just human. It was funny, and it brought a physical dimension to the meeting."



Sugarwish provides gift boxes for digital events that can be customized to include candy options, gourmet popcorn cookies.

### Sugarwish

Some organizers are sending [Sugarwish \(https://sugarwish.com/\)](https://sugarwish.com/) goodies — candy, popcorn, and cookie gift boxes — to attendees as a way to include an F&B experience in their digital event. Once someone is notified that they will be receiving a Sugarwish package, they are able to customize their order by choosing from 100 different candy options, 50 gourmet popcorn flavors, and approximately 25 types of cookies.

Since launching in 2012, Denver-based Sugarwish has provided gift boxes, which come in a variety of sizes, for a number of virtual events. For a recent virtual anniversary event for TBWA\WorldHealth, for example, celebratory gifts were sent to employees working from home.

"We created this model way before, obviously, without [the pandemic] in mind," said Elisabeth Vezzani, CEO and co-founder of Sugarwish. "But it is so helpful during this time because nobody can deliver Friday donuts to the office for a meeting. I can't think of a time where a little bit of joy sent to almost anyone is more needed than right now."

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