

Welcome to the Event Tech Podcast, where we explore the ever-evolving world of event technology every week. This show is brought to you by Endless Events, the event A/V company that doesn't suck. Now, let's talk tech.

Will Curran:

Hello, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome back to the Event Tech Podcast. This right here is the man, the ear-splitting Will Curran from Endless Events. Today I'm recording a podcast all by myself because I wanted to get this one out as soon as possible for everybody, because I thought it was a very important educational moment for talking a little bit about Zoom. Zoom, everybody's favorite meeting video platform out there. It's been getting a lot of attention now as virtual events are coming, and people are trying to figure out, "How can we communicate with our attendees and do webinars, and all these things like that?"

Will Curran:

I had just done a webinar with the International Live Events Association talking about how to use Zoom for their association meetings. So, what I wanted to do is, while I was on that webinar, I realized everyone has so many questions about Zoom. A lot of people, it's the first time they've ever used it, or maybe the first time they used it as a webinar platform, or maybe they've attended webinars. But what I wanted to do is I wanted to give it our Event Tech Podcast review format for how to use it, and what are its pros and cons, its pricing, all that information.

Will Curran:

And what's interesting is usually, when we do these Event Tech Podcast reviews, we have someone who utilizes it, right? And we interview them and try to dive deep into what their needs are, and their likes and dislikes and everything like that. Well, when it comes to this, we realized that we were already using Zoom for virtual events for many years, and been using Zoom probably for, now, over five, six years now total. So, wanted to give the opportunity for us to talk about our experience and tell you a little bit about what it was like. So, why don't we dive right on in with this week's Event Tech Podcast, the review of Zoom and what is possible when it comes to virtual events. So, let's dive right on into it.

Will Curran:

Yeah, I wanted to give you guys a little bit of background. So, before we dive into the review and what we did, we've been using Zoom as a company, for Endless, for many of years. I think five something plus years now we've been using Zoom. It is our preferred video chat platform internally for all of our events; it's what we use for all of our client meetings. We've probably logged thousands and thousands of hours inside of Zoom as a total.

Will Curran:

In addition to that, which is kind of the common scenario right now, using it as meetings, we also have used it as a webinar platform, both for our straight-up webinars, but also, if you've never heard of our other podcast called #EventIcons, which has now been running for four years total

now, we use Zoom as the platform for recording that show for a long period of time. One reason why is it allows you to put four people on the screen simultaneously, and we like that kind of Brady Bunch look. And so, we actually used it for #EventIcons to broadcast our livestream of our show, almost like a webinar and almost like a virtual event as well, every single week for probably two years, I think we use Zoom. So, we had to know it very intimately. We've seen it evolve over the years, we've seen good things, bad things, and essentially wanted to kind of share our experiences of what it's like.

Will Curran:

So, yeah. When it came to Zoom, the reason why we chose Zoom over a couple other different platforms... That's probably the first question we get, is, "Why'd you choose it over GoToMeeting, GoToWebinar, using it over Google Hangouts and things like that?" So, when we first started the show, we used a platform called Blab for... Primarily, let's talk about #EventIcons, right, because... as a webinar. And actually... Let's rewind that back.

Will Curran:

Let's talk about two major differences with Zoom that people need to understand as well. There's the Zoom meeting element, and then there's the Zoom webinar element. So, what most people are used to and used on a daily basis is the Zoom meetings element, where you have a host of the meeting, and you have attendees, and everyone can put their webcam on, anyone can talk whenever they want to talk, and there's a chat, and there's some whiteboarding elements and some collaboration elements, but it's really meant for pretty much as if you're sitting in a boardroom. Anyone can raise their hand, just start talking at any given moment.

Will Curran:

Then you have the Zoom webinar platform, which is more like going into, for example, a theater, and someone's on stage, and maybe multiple people on stage. Everyone can watch them, but the people in the audience don't talk, but they might raise their hand, they might be able to slip a note, that sort of thing. It's very much audience and stage kind of separated on each other.

Will Curran:

So that's important to know when you're talking about using it for virtual events. What are you looking to accomplish? If you want everyone to be able to talk to each other, maybe the meetings tool's going to be better. If you want to present content and you want people to chat and vote in polls and Q&A, maybe the webinar platform's more your route. And the important thing to know, and one of the most common questions I get, is what features are available on each, and everything like that.

Will Curran:

So, the question I always recommend, if you're looking at Zoom for a virtual event, is that you first go to their website, zoom.us, and then click on the Pricing page. They do a really good job educating everybody on what all the different features are and what's possible. So, for example, with personal meeting rooms, the Zoom meeting rooms, you can host up to a hundred people

for free, unlimited one-on-one meetings for up to 40 minutes each, for free. Super-duper cool, and there's a bunch of other features and things like that included.

Will Curran:

Well, then when you step up to the next level for the meetings tool, you can do up to a hundred participants again, but you can have a meeting as long as 24 hours. I don't know who would want to sit in a meeting for 24 hours, but that's totally possible within that. You also get some user management, you get the ability to record onto the cloud and things like that.

Will Curran:

Then the next step up is you can do a meeting with up to 300 people. Again, meeting, talking, everyone can talk, and it's more like anyone can raise their hand and join on in. Obviously, you can mute someone and choose to mute them if they're getting outrageous or whatever it is. But that's where you get kind of... 300 people, I can't even imagine a meeting where 300 people could talk, but... For example, maybe a classroom setting might be great for that, a classroom with 300 people.

Will Curran:

And also, all these plans, too, you can always buy more participants too. So, for example, that previous Pro plan that you get for \$14.99 per host per month, you can basically bump it on up. So, for example, looks like they have an option here where you can have a thousand people in a meeting, which is crazy. Then that next step up is that Business level, it's the \$19.99 plan, 300 people. You get some additional things like vanity URLs, custom emails, company branding, things like that, very cool.

Will Curran:

And then the next step up is they have Enterprise plans, like any software. They have custom availability if you want to talk to them about unlimited cloud storage, things like that, go in and talk to them about that, but you're going to have to talk to a salesperson to get the full pricing, and there's probably some minimums on there as well. I guess that's notable to say on here. So, the Business plan for 20 bucks a month has a minimum of 10 hosts, and the Enterprise has a minimum of 50 hosts on there as well. So, yeah, just an absolute... Definitely different settings when it comes to your meetings, as well.

Will Curran:

Well, when we go in and look at the webinar setting, that's where you're going to be paying \$40 per host for 100 attendees. Again, you can expand it up to more people can view, you can do up to where 10,000 people could watch a single webinar on here as well. And it has things like, for example, Q&A and things like that as well.

Will Curran:

What's very, very cool about a lot of these plans is, in addition to it, is they all have livestreaming capabilities, and that's what I'm going to talk about. At #EventIcons, we used it for its livestream

abilities, which is pretty darn cool, and there's a bunch of different opportunities, and also your ability to reach a larger audience as well. So we'll definitely talk about that.

Will Curran:

So, now that you kind of understand the difference between the meetings side of things and the webinar side of things, I wanted to talk about our experience using it, and where we saw some good things and where we saw some bad things along the way as well. So, let's talk a little bit about the meetings side of things. Obviously, for internal meetings, things like that, we still use it to this day, and we love the platform. We think it's super-duper easy to use. It integrates, for example, with Slack, so all we have to type is /zoom and we can start an instant Zoom room and start chatting with each other and get that going.

Will Curran:

We love, for example, the Google Calendar integration that allows us to instantly add a Zoom meeting to an existing calendar event, so allows us to spin up calendar invites for virtual remote meetings very, very easily. And it's also, its recording abilities look really, really good, it allows you to do things... For example, we used it for a little while to also record the Event Tech Podcast as well, because it does also individual audio streams. There's so many possibilities when it comes to the recording, and we absolutely love it for meetings, and it is, at Endless, our go-to tool for all of our team meetings and things like that, our virtual happy hours for within our company, and everything like that.

Will Curran:

Then what I really want to focus on, though, is the webinar side of things. That's the thing I think not a lot of people have gotten a chance to use as admins and things like that, and I think that's where a lot of people have questions. Whether you want to use Zoom for your event... Obviously, listen to all of our other content when we talk about, like, "Choose why, choose the purpose," and things like that. Using Zoom is not going to be perfect for every virtual event. But what it's really, really good at is if you have someone who needs to present content, especially in one enclosed kind of environment, and then needs to finish, for example, an hour-long webinar, or you're going to do a panel discussion with a couple different panelists. Great for that sort of thing.

Will Curran:

Where I don't see a lot of value in Zoom is the ability to hop from multiple things to multiple things. So, for example, if you wanted the ability for people to choose your own adventure and go to different sessions, and hop in and out of rooms, well, you're going to need another system to be able to do that, right? You're going to need some sort of website with those Zoom links all on it, so then that way everyone knows which rooms go... "What Zoom room do I go into? When do I go into it?" All those things like that, and that can be a lot of work on there as well.

Will Curran:

But where it worked out really well for #EventIcons is that we were needing a platform where we could bring in up to four people, maybe more, to have a discussion around a topic, in this case their history, or maybe their topic, or whatever it is. And when we first started #EventIcons, we started it on a platform called Blab, which was designed originally for up to four people and could livestream essentially where anyone could join via Twitter, essentially, and start asking questions and join on in. People could enter in ease, leave really easily, and it was super-duper easy. It was kind of the beginning stages of Facebook Live and YouTube Live; it was definitely ahead of its time.

Will Curran:

Well, when Blab shut down, we were looking for what that next step was going to be, and that's when we looked into Zoom. And what we really liked about Zoom is, from a marketing standpoint for webinars, is that it integrated with HubSpot, and that was one reason, number one feature that we're looking for. So what we ended up creating was a landing page inside HubSpot, which was our registration platform, and if people wanted to join in for the conversation, they joined in, and then what was great is using the integration, when they submitted all their information to register, it automatically added it into Zoom, and Zoom sent over their link to join, all those things like that as well. It also sent back some data, so we could see who viewed, who actually stayed and watched, who didn't show up, everything like that.

Will Curran:

And what we essentially did is set up a reoccurring webinar every single week at 5:00 p.m. Eastern, and it worked out really well, that literally, the registration, people could just go to it, and it was seamless. The only thing we had to worry about was communicating to the panelists and adding and subtracting panelists from the system. And what's great about it is that if you... For example, the attendees obviously get the emails and everything like that. You can set up reminder emails so they know when it's coming. But what's great about it as well is you can add panelists. So, I obviously, among a lot of people, Brandt and Alex and all of our pasts hosts, and Laura and [Suhira 00:11:55] and Audrey, they all needed to come in and out as hosts and be able to host at any time. So we added them all as hosts, they could come in and host at any given moment. But we needed the ability that we could add a panelist in and subtract them when there wasn't an episode.

Will Curran:

So what we ended up having to do is, every week, is leading up to the episode, when we were one week out, is delete the person who was a panelist the last week, and then re-add them. But what was great is it automatically emailed that person a link, said, "Hey, here's all the information you need," everything like that. And Zoom was actually pretty darn easy for people to use. I think nowadays, everyone's used to getting a Zoom link, especially now, right?

Will Curran:

And so, what was great about it is that it was super easy to use. But here's where the problem kind of landed, is that we had this reoccurring series that was happening. We didn't have the

ability to say, "Seven weeks from now, John's going to be our guest on the podcast, let's put him on that episode," because Zoom didn't allow you to quite do that. So we had to just add and remove people every single week, and if we added them too far in advance, it would send them a reminder of every single reoccurring webinar leading up to that point.

Will Curran:

So that was one of the tough parts, is there had to be a very heavy-handed portion of communication with the panelist to understand which link they were going to, made sure they had it. We had people that said, "I didn't get the link, can you please resend it?" So, what ended up happening is we ended up having to create a role called the podcast manager, who literally sole job was scheduling and kind of handholding guests to make sure they showed up on time, everything like that. They'd also show up to make sure that their tech worked and everything like that, which was great, and honestly, every virtual event should have kind of a manager that's able to get into the room early, make sure they're working okay, can send them reminders, things like that. But it becomes a lot of work very, very quickly.

Will Curran:

The next thing that I would say is that as we started doing it, we really liked it because it allowed you to record very, very easily. In fact, the cloud recording was really nice, because we could record to the cloud and someone else could access it. I didn't have to download a file, wait for it to upload to Google Drive, then share it for it to be edited and everything like that as well. It recorded very, very easily.

Will Curran:

One thing that we also really liked about Zoom initially, too, is the Q&A features are fantastic. In fact, I think it has one of the best Q&A functionalities of any webinar platform, where, for example, you can click on a question and say, "I'm going to answer this question," which is great when we had multiple hosts, that we'd see questions coming in and be like, "Oh, I'm going to ask this question. I'll be the one that brings it in." Or, you know, you could also type questions as well. Sometimes people would ask things like, "Hey, I can't hear anything, what's going on?" You don't want to hop on the webinar and be like, "Hey, John, I know you're having trouble hearing, here's how you do it." Sometimes you just want to type a response. So, what was great about it is it literally had a type and send private messages in response to questions coming in the Q&A panel, which I absolutely loved.

Will Curran:

And then, what was also great is Zoom had polling platforms. We didn't really use it for that. But we also really liked the chat as well, so people could send in reactions and things like that. We'd also use it so we could communicate directly with the panelists, so as they were going through, we could send them a message and be like, "Hey, oh, we just got this question in," and we could say in the chat, so while they were going through the question, or if they had a problem, like they're like, "Hey, my internet's getting wonky," they could message us directly, not on the actual webinar that was being recorded, but text directly with us.

Will Curran:

So there's a lot of really cool things on there, but we really had to get good at it. That's probably one of the best tips I can give when it comes to Zoom, is you have to practice this stuff. If you've never used Zoom before and you're considering it right now, you need to get in there, sign up for it, get in a trial, and test it out. Test it in a small scale, give it a try, and see what happens. Because the way we got good at it is that we did this every single week for two years, so we became pros at the platform and how we ran it. But for you, you might say, you hop in and you say, "I didn't even know about half these features. I didn't know it was possible, virtual backgrounds and things like that as well." So, I think that it's really important that you get a chance to practice inside the platform as well, so you can maximize the tools.

Will Curran:

So, things that I also really, really liked about Zoom is that the video quality was very, very good, compared to some other platforms like GoToMeeting and some others that really downscaled the video, Zoom really kept video quality very high. And I've noticed that even when you're doing a mobile device and calling in for a meeting, video quality always looks pretty spot-on. And it always prioritizes audio over video, so, for example, if someone's internet connection's slow, it'll start dropping the video before it focuses on audio. But the video usually looks really, really good compared to a lot of platforms.

Will Curran:

It is 720p quality for the video, especially the recordings as well, so, for example, if you're looking to get a really high-definition video quality, might not be the best, though. 720p looks good on all devices, and it streams really well to most attendees and things like that; however, if you're looking for that 4K crispy quality, you're probably not going to get it very, very easily. So, make sure that you keep that in mind, 720p quality. And then obviously, if you put four people on a screen and you do that Brady Bunch style, you know, those are going to be even lower quality on there as well.

Will Curran:

What also I like about Zoom is that you have the option to be doing that Brady Bunch four people, or a hundred people on a screen at once, but you can also do whoever's actively speaking, their video gets focused, it looks really, really good on there as well. Obviously, you can share your screen, you can do drawings on screen, whiteboarding, all that sort of stuff, looks really, really good.

Will Curran:

So, here's the part, the downsides. While we're talking about video quality, I do want to talk about audio quality, and I think that no one's really quite talking about this. Most people don't realize that Zoom is primarily used for spoken word, it's used for meetings, it's used to webinars where people are talking. It is not used for streaming full-quality media on here.

Will Curran:

So, we'll start by talking about audio. Zoom actually does a lot of smart things to compress the audio to make it a lot easier to stream, and that's why it sounds and looks so good, is that it's compressing everything heavily. Well, when it comes to sharing things like high-quality music, or, for example, you want to have a really epic video intro played on your PowerPoint, you're not going to get all that low end. In fact, it usually chops off the low end of the audio, so then that way, it can save for the quality of what people are really hearing, the high end and the mid range, which is where you hear your voices. So, Zoom can actually have a poor audio experience. So, if you are looking at doing a presentation with really high-quality video where it sounds like a Netflix movie when you're listening to it, Zoom is not the option. I highly tell so many clients that if they want audio quality to sound fantastic for music or video trailers, or whatever it may be, Zoom is not an option.

Will Curran:

The second thing, as well, is if you're sharing your screen, it has this "optimize for full-screen video," which is kind of a deceptive box, but one of the important things, I think, for people to know is that when you're sharing your screen and playing a video in a PowerPoint, or sharing your screen and showing a video in QuickTime, whatever it may be, Zoom is not going to show the full quality of that video in the full frame rate. The frame rate is the number of frames that you have per second. So, for example, a standard video is usually 30 frames per second. What Zoom does is, to save bandwidth and make it work for everybody, is it drops it down to like 10 frames per second.

Will Curran:

So, for example, when Endless does our demo presentations to our clients, we say, "Hey, look at these videos of our clients talking." And if you watch the videos, you'll see it only shows a flash of the video every couple seconds. And the audio's perfectly sounding right, right? But the video is just only, almost like it's choppy, it looks choppy to everybody. And that's because Zoom's doing that to save bandwidth and make it easier for everybody. My hope is that this changes in the future as they continue to evolve and expand now, but the important thing to know is that if you're showing, screen-sharing video content and things like that, Zoom is not the option. So, I think if you're listening to this right now, and video content and audio content is very important to you for presenting and showing off things, do not use Zoom as your platform. However, if you're just doing webcam, you're doing some simple PowerPoint slides, Zoom could be great for you.

Will Curran:

Important thing to know, too, and why Zoom might not be the best platform, and I got a lot of questions about, "Is it a good platform for livestreaming to social media networks?" Not necessarily the best, and the reason why is that it has the ability to push to Facebook, it has the ability to push to YouTube Live as well. You can even push to what's called an RTMP server, which is kind of the technology that Endless uses to push to our servers and do our livestreaming and everything like that. This is very, very cool. However, the important thing to

know is that if people ask questions on social media or chat in social media, that information does not come back into Zoom.

Will Curran:

That was one of the frustrations with #EventIcons, is that we were livestreaming to Facebook Live and all these things like that, and people were asking questions. We had to have a separate role, someone literally sitting out on social media looking for comments, watching all the livestreams, and when people had questions, then message them to us on a separate chat platform, in our case Slack. Well, you would say, "Why don't they message you inside the chat in Zoom?" Well, the problem is, if they're in the chat in Zoom, they're on screen for the entire webinar. So, again, it created this hassle where we weren't getting the questions fast enough. It also didn't create this direct communication and things like that.

Will Curran:

So now, since then, we've switched to a totally different platform that when people ask questions on social media, it goes directly into the same webinar platform for us to communicate. So, if livestreaming to social media's important, and engagement on social media's important, and you want to be able to engage directly when someone leaves a comment, say, "Hey, John, thank you so much," and you don't want to have someone copy and pasting the responses in there, Zoom is not the option for you as well.

Will Curran:

What other things are to be aware of when it comes to Zoom as well? The other thing, too, is the hosting structure can be kind of complicated. So, obviously you pay \$40 per month per host, so if you are looking at, for example, you want to get a lot of people on webinars, and you have a lot of people hosting between multiple webinars, you're going to have to buy a lot of accounts for every single person. What we ended up having to do is create one account for somebody, and we wanted to save costs, so we ended up having to share the password for that, or that host always had to log in first, get the webinar spun up and going, people would join, and then you can make the other person a host. Well, again, this might be an option for you if you're looking to save money and you're looking at doing it kind of on the budget, but if you're looking at doing this regularly, and you want people to be turnkey, be able to set up their own webinars, you're going to end up paying \$40 per user per month, and that can add up really, really quick for a platform as well.

Will Curran:

Let's see about other things related to Zoom that you should be aware of when it comes to virtual events, is that also, at the same time too, it doesn't really allow for that full event feeling. Again, I feel like Zoom's good for one presentation at a time, not for, we're going to do a million presentations at the same time, and you have to pick and choose and do all these things from it. I think the platform is good for doing that single meeting, but you're going to need an additional platform in that case. So, something to keep in mind is we've done a ton of content on all-in-one platforms versus integrated and everything like that. If you're looking at Zoom and you like the

quality of Zoom, or your attendees are used to Zoom, whatever it may be, but you're looking at expanding and doing multiple Zoom rooms, things like that, you're going to start wanting to look into some virtual event platforms and asking your technical event production company or your virtual event production company, "Hey, how can we integrate these together and bring it all together there as well?"

Will Curran:

Ultimately, though, at Endless, we decided that Zoom was not cutting it for us anymore from the livestreaming standpoint, from a cost standpoint, and everything like that, so we ended up just deciding to move on to a different platform, so, for webinars, and for specifically #EventIcons on there as well. We still use it internally for webinars, we still use it for the occasional one-off because it integrates really well with HubSpot, but there's honestly so many more platforms available, and I lean a lot more towards some other ones as well, because they tend to be innovating a lot faster. Zoom was doing a great job and had great quality, but honestly, they've kind of hit stagnation at this point, and we're kind of begging for a little bit more features, a little bit more.

Will Curran:

So, if you're looking for things like, for example, you want to do prerecorded webinars that look live, or you want to do things like, for example, prerecord a webinar that people can log on to and watch, and then the presenter is chatting away in the background as well, that's not really possible with Zoom. If you're looking at doing high-quality video... There's so many things, I think, that you can do better when it comes to Zoom, and I think that's one reason why I wanted to make this video ultimately, and kind of to conclude, is that when you're looking at Zoom for a virtual event platform, there's way more that you have possible. Don't settle for just, "Hey, it's what I'm familiar with. Hey, this looks inexpensive. Hey, I know this well." Be willing to bring partners in, just like you do with your events. If you don't know A/V, you don't say, "I'm going to figure it out on my own"; you bring in an A/V company. The same way as well, bring in your event tech, virtual event production company to help you out with this stuff.

Will Curran:

And for those who don't know, that's what I do, so I know I'm kind of tooting my own horn. But, you know, let me know. I want to hear from you guys, you guys know how to reach us, eventtechpodcast@helloendless.com. Shoot me an email if you have questions about Zoom or what you would want us to expand upon. Maybe we do a two-parter of this episode. But let us know what you are thinking, what you have questions about, and why you maybe chose Zoom. I get it, Zoom is great for a lot of people out there, and you might be thinking to yourself, "Well, I love Zoom, it's totally fine, let's do it." Totally cool, it works for a lot of people. But what I want to challenge our event professionals out there to do is to think bigger. Let's create better experiences, let's create more engaging experiences, and let's just keep crushing it using event technology to take our events to the next level.

Will Curran:

Well, that's going to do it for this week's episode of Event Tech Podcast. My name is Will Curran. You guys know how to reach us. Remember to rate and review us on your favorite podcasting platforms, and as always, head over to eventtechpodcast.com. That's where you can find out what platforms we're on, you can subscribe, get invites to our Facebook and LinkedIn groups, all that sort of stuff, and also get links to all the resources and pricing pages and everything that I recommended down below. Well, guys, that's going to do it for this week's episode of Event Tech Podcast. I'll look forward to seeing you soon, next time on the Event Tech Podcast.

Thanks again for listening to the Event Tech Podcast. Be sure to rate and review us on your favorite podcasting app. Also, be sure to head to eventtechpodcast.com and leave us a comment about this week's episode. We'll see you next week on the Event Tech Podcast.