

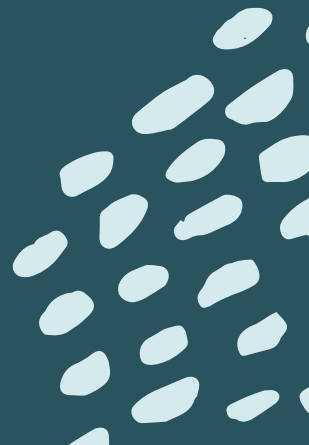


A FRANCHISOR'S GUIDE:

How to Make the Most of Your (Virtual) Franchise Conference



With insights from Jennifer Tate,
Director of Corporate Events at Orangetheory Fitness



An impactful event

Whether in-person or virtual, a conference is one of the best ways to build your franchise's community and strengthen relationships with franchisees.

There's nothing quite like hanging out in real time with franchisees to:

- Energize
- Educate
- Share exciting announcements
- Foster a network

Most importantly, conferences help you fire up your whole company for the year ahead in a fun and engaging way. This guide outlines how to take full advantage of your next virtual franchise conference, including insights from Jennifer Tate, Director of Corporate Events at Orangetheory Fitness.

So, let's get planning.



Plan with franchisees in mind

Design your conference to serve your franchisees. After all, their success is your success.

To start on the right foot, give franchisees ample time to plan for your event and keep their needs at the forefront. Consult with previous conference attendees to find out what topics they enjoyed and identify opportunities to improve. Ask them to share feedback related to timing, duration, and locations or virtual platforms.

Timing

Keep seasonality in mind. Choose dates that work best for your franchisees and their typical business cycle. For example, if you're in the fitness industry, avoid the first few months of the year when franchisees are hustling to help with New Year's resolutions. Also, consider the days of the week. If Friday through Sunday are your franchisees' busiest days, midweek may be your best bet.



Duration

The event should be long enough to be impactful but short enough to prevent information overload. With the rise of virtual classes and events, franchisees may feel wary of adding more screen time to their schedule (we've all been there). Consider breaking your agenda up into several 30-90 minute sessions over one or two days. Remember to include breaks, too.

Platform and Location

Hosting a virtual conference makes it easy for franchisees from every geographic location to attend. Tate advises that "a great virtual platform is needed"—they use Cvent Virtual Attendee Hub.

As the world emerges from COVID-19, Orangetheory Fitness plans to offer hybrid events. "To bridge the gap between in-person and online conferences in the future, we'll be conducting hybrid events that allow attendees to choose if they want to attend face-to-face or virtually," explains Tate. "The in-person event will be streamed virtually to attendees who choose to stay at home. Each option will have an appropriate cost associated."

Regardless of the location and format, make sure your conference is safe and accessible for everyone. As you begin planning in-person events again, look for places near major airports.



Develop a powerful agenda

Include a balance of educational content and interactive activities—even when going virtual. About half of your agenda should include inspiration and education from keynotes and outside experts, training on new products or systems, or corporate updates. The other half should allow time for franchisees to interact and ask questions.



"We kept all parts of our agenda short and scheduled our virtual event as if it were in-person," shares Tate. "During each session, we incorporated some kind of interactive component—whether it was prompting attendees to add to the chatbox or getting them to move." Orangetheory Fitness's virtual event was 4.5 hours, including:

- A 90-minute opening with an emcee and three speakers
- Two 10-minute meditation sessions
- Two 45-minute breakout sessions
- A 15-minute break between each session
- A closing session with a DJ
- A virtual workout at the end

The key to a successful virtual conference is to keep it fresh and engaging. Break up the screen time with activities that get your attendees thinking, chatting, and moving.

STRATEGIC ACCOUNT
Fitness Track

BOLD | the mindbody conference
November 18, 2020

9:00 AM - 9:15 AM **Welcome**
Josh McCarter – CEO, Mindbody
It has been a year of tribulations for many of the top leaders in the fitness industry. We welcome you today to reflect on lessons learned, to celebrate the endurance that has carried you through, and to explore ways we can innovate and collaborate toward a successful future together.

9:15 AM - 10:00 AM **Building a Wellness Business That Lasts Through Leadership and Technology**
Rick Stollmeyer – Co-founder, Mindbody
Wellness has become one of the largest and most important business opportunities of our age, fueled by massive societal trends, rapid technology innovations, and hundreds of thousands of wellness business entrepreneurs. And while the COVID-19 pandemic created an immediate and lasting crisis that has challenged the sustainability of many wellness businesses, a wave of inspiration and transformation in the industry has risen to combat it. This session will cover how to weave your passion for wellness into leadership and leverage technologies to maintain a lasting business through COVID and beyond.


10:00 AM - 11:00 AM **Keynote**
Glennon Doyle
Moderated Discussion Followed by Q & A
Glennon Doyle is the author of the #1 New York Times bestseller UNTAMED, a Reese's Book Club selection. She's also the author of New York Times bestsellers LOVE WARRIOR (an Oprah's Book Club selection) and CARRY ON, WARRIOR. An activist and thought leader, Glennon is the founder and president of Together Rising, an all-women led nonprofit organization that has revolutionized grassroots philanthropy – raising over \$25 million for women, families, and children in crisis. She lives in Florida with her wife and three children.

11:00 AM - 12:45 PM **From Concept to Execution**
Select Panelists
Hear from business leaders who have experienced great success leveraging virtual across their franchises. We examine how an effective video on demand and live stream strategy can enhance your brand, and look at effective ways to structure a packaging and delivery method for virtual services. From pricing, promotion, technology needs, and instructor sourcing—learn what's been working and why.

12:45 AM - 1:00 PM **Industry Icon Award & Raffle**
Sunil Rajasekar – CTO, Mindbody
We conclude the day by recognizing our most innovative customer, and by celebrating each of you and your resilience this year with some exciting raffle prizes and giveaways.



Content



Start by choosing a theme that's relevant to current industry trends related to your franchise. A theme helps rally attendees around a shared vision. "For us, our virtual theme was 'We Go All Out Together' based on our 2021 company marketing theme. It allowed us to showcase the future," explains Tate. "Additionally, our theme brought everyone together. We created a sense of teamwork and camaraderie."

Once you've chosen a theme for your conference, use a pre-event survey to find out what other topics your franchisees are interested in, then develop additional educational tracks from there. Allow personalized agendas so franchisees can take away what's most valuable for their businesses.

Keynote speaker

A keynote speaker can transform your conference. Their speech will set the tone and help establish your event's theme. Choosing the right person is vital.

If your conference is happening on-screen, look for a keynote speaker who has a strong virtual presence. "Your speakers need to feel comfortable presenting in a virtual environment. Virtual presence isn't a hard skill to learn—but it does take time and practice," says Tate.

When recruiting a keynote speaker, consider:

- **Your franchisee's recommendations.** Survey who they're interested in hearing from, both inside and outside your industry.
- **Your event timing.** Most speakers' calendars are scheduled out months or years in advance. This is yet another reason to plan early.
- **Your budget.** Speaker fees range widely and can be lofty. Remember, an exceptional keynote helps create an extraordinary event. So, consider your keynote speaker an investment.
- **Your goals.** Instead of focusing on big names and celebrity status, look for a speaker that authentically represents your vision and goals for the event. Your keynote's experience, brand, and content should align with your event's theme. Above all, they should provide unique value to your franchisees with a customized message.
- **Your franchise's brand.** Be sure to choose speakers who share core values with your brand. Keynote speakers are connected to your brand the moment you announce them, and you need to be comfortable (better yet, thrilled) about that.

The ideal speaker will inspire your franchisees and leave a lasting impression. That's why you'll want to kick off your conference with a powerful keynote. If you're able to close with one, too, it gives attendees another compelling reason to stay (in-person or online) through the end of the event.





Networking

Outside of keynotes and educational sessions, prioritize community and collaboration among franchisees through interactive activities.

Include a live chat for attendees to connect throughout the day. Look for a virtual event platform that includes an appointment tool to schedule one-on-one and small-group sessions, such as Cvent Virtual Attendee Hub.

For franchisees, having a network of people like them is invaluable. The more opportunities you provide to form genuine relationships with one another, the better.

Support

Give franchisees access to your corporate team for Q&A and support. Consider offering one-on-one or small-group appointments to ensure they feel heard. This is also an opportunity to build stronger connections between corporate and franchisees.



"We included live and engaging breakout sessions. Many of them were panels that allowed for Q&A," explains Tate. Providing opportunities for live support is an excellent way to keep the conversation current and relevant.





Rehearse before the event

The key to a successful conference is a smooth run-through from beginning to end. This is especially important for virtual conferences, which require just as much planning as in-person events, if not more, according to Tate.

To make every presentation as impactful as possible, get your speakers ready. Tate recommends hosting a workshop for speakers to learn and practice virtual presence and body language before the conference.



"If time permits, schedule rehearsals to ensure speakers are comfortable with the delivery and the platform you're using," says Tate.

She also recommends pre-recording as many sessions as possible. As a bonus, Orangetheory Fitness hired an emcee, who "connected the day and kept everyone engaged," says Tate.

Remember to do a test run with your technology before the event, too. There's nothing worse than muffled audio or a frozen screen in the middle of a keynote speech.



Incentivize attendance

You can measure your event's success mainly by how many franchisees attend. That's why it's so critical to talk about the value of your conference regularly.

As you recruit and onboard franchisees, set the expectation that your conference is a must-attend event (even if it's technically not required).

Discuss the benefits of both the community and educational opportunities. If possible, highlight results from those who attend versus those who don't.

Build excitement with pre-event teaser emails ("Here's a sneak peek of our next conference"). Share key takeaways live on social media (creating fear of missing out, or FOMO, for those who aren't there). Offer discounts at the event for the next one.

A well-attended event this year builds momentum, unifies your franchisees, and leads to even higher attendance next year (hopefully in-person.)



Prepare your leadership team

Your conference is a great opportunity for corporate executives to meet with franchisees.

It gives them a platform to dive deep into corporate strategies that impact each location in the coming year.

More importantly, it gives your corporate all-stars a chance to get face-to-face time with franchisees and get a much better understanding of their individual needs.

To make every presentation as impactful as possible, get your leadership team ready. Schedule rehearsals to run through timing and logistics and to test presentations and technology.

Off-stage, encourage leaders to chat with franchisees one-on-one or in groups. Prepare them to discuss strategy, answer questions, and work through issues with franchisees as they arise. This is especially important if you host interactive panels or Q&A sessions—both of which are fantastic ways to engage attendees.





Recognize your franchisees

Never underestimate the power of recognition, especially at a conference.

It boosts morale, sparks friendly competition between locations, and increases the sense of loyalty to your organization.

Hand out awards throughout your event or with a designated award ceremony. The awards don't need to be elaborate—a certificate, medal, or plaque will suffice—but should be aesthetically-pleasing so franchisees want to show them off at their businesses.

Conclusion

A lot goes into pulling off a successful franchise conference. But, the time and financial investments are well worth it.

While the location, agenda, and extra events are important considerations, focus on how you want franchisees to feel. An annual conference should invigorate franchisees and fuel their love for the brand and what they do. Do it right, and enjoy returns on this annual event throughout the year.





To learn first-hand how Mindbody can position your business for success, [schedule a guided tour today.](#)