

# IROs adopting virtual meetings en masse, study finds

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## *Vast majority of IROs brace for virtual meetings, finds survey*

Less than 50 percent of IR professionals had participated in virtual investor meetings before the Covid-19 outbreak, but nine in 10 will include virtual meetings in their plans for the next 12 months, according to a recent survey from IHS Markit.

The spread of Covid-19 has had an impact on all aspects of business and prompted IR professionals to discover alternative ways to engage with investors amid travel restrictions and business shutdowns.

The vast majority (97 percent) of respondents say the pandemic has changed their current IR program plans, including non-deal roadshows and conferences, for the next 12 months.

The survey of 46 IR professionals from North America, Europe and Asia conducted in the second half of March reveals that 43 percent of respondents are already hosting virtual activities with investors.

These virtual meetings often include the highest-level executives within companies, with more than 50 percent including the CEO, CFO and IR team. A further 15 percent of virtual roadshows include the CFO and IR, while about 20 percent are IR-only.

## **Value of in-person meetings vs time and cost-efficiency**

Driven by a growing need to go virtual in an unfolding crisis, nine in 10 IROs say the virus outbreak has increased their interest in virtual IR activities for the next 12 months. More than 95 percent are somewhat or very likely to hold a virtual IR event in the next 12 months.

‘The world post-Covid-19 will be very different and the functioning of IR departments will also need to evolve,’ says Amit Bhalla, head of IR at global energy management and automation firm Schneider Electric. ‘The increased use of digital tools and virtual meetings for

engagement with the buy side was an already increasing trend before Covid-19. I certainly believe it will further accelerate [after] the crisis.’

When asked to rank which investor activities are most likely to go virtual, the majority of IROs feel most comfortable with hosting earnings calls and AGMs. Respondents are least likely to participate in virtual conferences or host a virtual investor day due to the complexity and value of in-person exchange. Most IROs believe in-person meetings are ideal for conducting in-depth strategy discussions at investor days.

‘I don’t believe there will be no physical meetings in the future but both investors and corporates will appreciate the efficiency and value in hosting digital interactions – not just for meetings but also to showcase products, facilities and enable group meetings,’ adds Bhalla. ‘I suppose many best practices of the IR departments using digital technology will evolve in the coming weeks and months.’