

# THE EVENT ORGANISER'S GUIDE TO LEEDS DIGITAL FESTIVAL

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LEEDS  
DIGITAL  
FESTIVAL  
2021

# Leeds Digital Festival: The Tech Event for Everyone

The Leeds Digital Festival is an open, collaborative celebration of digital culture in all its forms. Whether you're interested in coding, fintech, social media, AI, healthtech, data, start-ups, digital music, cyber security or AR/VR, we've got something for you.

Returning in 2021 for its 6th year, and following the success of the April "mini-fest", Leeds Digital Festival will be hosting a two-week programme packed with tech content this Autumn. Join us **September 20th – 1st October** as we invite the tech world's best and brightest to come together and show the world our dynamic digital sector.

We know the past year has been challenging and that much is still uncertain, but our hope is that the Autumn Festival will include a number of in-person events – Government guidelines permitting – in addition to the digital programme on offer.

In 2020, our two Covid-interrupted festivals saw us grow our international reach, with the Festival's 428 online events welcoming over 45,000 attendees from over 60 countries across the globe.

With an ever-growing voice and reach, Leeds Digital Festival will continue to celebrate the digital expertise and innovation that is happening in the city on a regional, national and international level.

The Festival has maintained the same collaborative approach since it first began in 2016, operating on an open-platform system which means that anyone can host an event - and it's free to do so. From start-ups to tech giants, anyone with a passion for tech and digital is encouraged to get involved and be part of Leeds Digital Festival 2021.

## Submitting Your Event

As Leeds Digital Festival runs on an open platform, we welcome submissions from businesses across the digital sector. So, whether you're just starting out, scaling up, or a tech powerhouse in your own right, there's room for you at #LeedsDigi21.

If you'd like to get involved and host either a virtual or physical event at Leeds Digital Festival this September, the submissions process couldn't be simpler. You'll just need to send us the event details – including an event title, image, description, and booking link – for our team to review before listing on the website.

Our submissions page will go live in mid-June, and we'll announce through the website and our social media once it's open for business. **Please note that your event details should be sent via the submissions page ONLY; events sent via email will not be listed.**

Check out what you'll need to submit below so you can begin planning.

### Choosing an Event Title

What's in a name? Well, quite a bit actually. We're expecting to include around 300 events in the September Programme, so your title needs to stand out and clearly communicate to your audience what they're signing up for.

Think of the event name as your first chance to make an impression on potential attendees. If the title's a snooze-fest people might assume the same about your event, and whilst a snappy name alone can't guarantee good attendance, it certainly doesn't hurt!

#### Top Tips:

**Get straight to the point** – There's nothing worse than a wordy title that packs in buzzword after buzzword, but still leaves you scratching your head. Choose something that gives attendees a clear idea of what they're signing up for, in as few words as possible.

**Avoid generic titles** – You'll win no prizes for being vague when it comes to naming your LDF event. Titles like “Social Media Strategy” or “Responding to Coronavirus” give nothing away and don't do a great job of convincing someone why they should attend your event. Put yourself in the shoes of someone browsing the LDF website: faced with 300 events, who's got the time to guess what content your event might include? No-one. So, make your title as specific as possible, and ensure that the right people are signing up.

**Don't be afraid to be funny!** – Tech is a serious business, but your event name doesn't have to be. A memorable tongue-in-cheek title can do wonders for sign-ups, and establish the tone of your event before it's even begun – not to mention the extra promotional value that a 'punny' title can bring. Here are a few cheeky examples from previous Festivals:

**“What the FLoC”**

**“Your Place or Ours - The Future Workplace”**

**“The Road to Better Data – a Highways England Ontology”**

## Choosing an Event Image

Yes, it's important that people know who's hosting the event but no, that doesn't make your company logo the perfect default when it comes to choosing an event image.

The title and image are the first two things anyone will see. Together, they set the tone for what content and value your event will deliver, long before anyone's had a chance to read the full description. See our tips below on how to make your visuals work hard so you don't have to.

### Top Tips:

**Hi-res, no-text** – They say a picture is worth a thousand words, and when it comes to a thumbnail, that teeny-tiny picture has got a lot of talking to do. So, for obvious reasons, avoid text-heavy images and opt for something that communicates the focus of your event with visuals rather than words.

**Size matters** – The submissions form will notify you if your image is too large or small, and you'll be able to see the crop zone - so make sure the focal point of your photo is exciting enough to draw in attendees.

**Functionality is key** - Before making your selection, think about the various ways the image will be used in the lead-up to the Festival. As well as featuring on the website in various sizes, the image you choose could be incorporated into social media marketing, mailers, press releases and more. So, as well as being hi-res, no-text and correctly sized, it pays to be pretty too!

**There's no shame in a stock photo** – If you have an in-house marketing team that is happy to knock you up a few graphics, that's great. But if you don't, we'd recommend utilising sites like Unsplash, Shutterstock and Pexels which are packed with thousands of free images – just let us know the artist's details so we can credit them accordingly.

## Writing Your Event Description

When it comes to creating interest for your event, the snappy title and strong visuals you've selected will do a lot of the hard work for you. But the description is where the real magic happens!

The event description is your opportunity to tell the audience what unmissable content you'll be bringing to LDF, and why attendees should want to book a ticket. For maximum impact, we'd recommend keeping it to a few paragraphs and being as creative as you can.

### Top Tips:

**Keep it simple** – The best descriptions frame the question and give the audience a taste of what to expect from the event. Avoid overwhelming potential attendees with inaccessible jargon, and only use terminology that's relevant to your audience.

**If in doubt** - If you're new to the festival and looking for a bit more guidance on how you should structure your description; start by contextualising your core event question, provide a brief outline of the topics up for discussion, and then let attendees know who'll be speaking at your event.

**Choose your guests/ panellists wisely** – Your description should explain the value each contributor brings to the discussion. Why should someone want to hear these people speak? Including relevant accomplishments can be a persuasive way to encourage sign-ups. Have they built an award-winning company from the ground up? Maybe they're pioneering life-changing tech? See 'The Review Process' below for how you can build a diverse panel and maximise your appeal.

We recommend that all panels feature speaker bios on the event page, and where possible, headshots too. Headshots should be hi-resolution and correctly sized. Any images that don't meet this standard might not be featured on the website.

## Adding Your Booking Link

Leeds Digital Festival runs on an open platform, so in addition to planning and hosting your event, as an organiser you'll also be responsible for managing the booking process.

This means you'll need to create a booking page, and provide us with the link during the submission process. We then add this link to your event listing on the LDF website, so we can encourage sign-ups by directing potential attendees straight to you.

Please make sure that the event date and time listed on your booking page is correct.

Which booking site you choose to list the event on is completely up to you; we just need the link. Around 90% of our hosts use sites like Eventbrite or MeetUp, and Zoom Webinar offers a good alternative if you're planning to host a virtual Zoom event.

**Please note, you won't be able to submit your event without a functional booking link.**

## The Final Details

In addition to the above, during the event submission process you'll also need to select which areas of the digital sector your event is most aligned with from a list of 19 possible categories (Healthtech, AI, Data etc.). Selection is limited to a maximum of three categories to allow for more efficient search and filtration on the LDF website, and to ensure the right people find your event.

You'll also need to select the date and time of your event, which you can do using the calendar. If you've selected a time already occupied by an event covering similar tech categories, the calendar will notify you.

Given the scope of the Leeds Digital Festival programme, some overlap in the schedule is inevitable, but we'd strongly recommend that you avoid hosting at the same time as an event covering similar content.

If you're hosting a Fintech event, for example, a scheduling clash with an Edtech or AR/VR event would likely have little to no effect on your attendance, but a scheduling clash with another Fintech event could prove to be problematic for everyone involved. Hosting your event at the same time as another with similar themes means you'll have to work twice as hard to vie for the audience's attention, and puts potential attendees in the difficult position of having to choose which event to go to. In short, nobody wins!

The LDF team will make every effort during the submission review process to identify potential overlap in the schedule, and will contact you directly should we need to discuss any scheduling concerns regarding your event. If you have any questions about the festival schedule and wish to talk with the Festival team directly, you can contact us on [admin@leedsdigitalfestival.org](mailto:admin@leedsdigitalfestival.org)

The Leeds Digital Festival Awards will take place 6pm-9pm on Wednesday 29th September. Given the popularity of this event in previous years, and to avoid a conflict of interests for awards attendees, we would strongly recommend that you avoid hosting your event at this time.

You're able to submit as many events as you like but please note that each new event should be sent as a separate submission.

**The submission deadline is Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> August at 5pm. Any event received after this deadline will not be included in the programme.**

## The Review Process

Once your event details have been submitted, they'll be reviewed by the Leeds Digital Festival team. The review stage is where we're able to double-check that we have all the necessary information.

Each year LDF welcomes a programme of events as broad as it is brilliant, and though we rarely reject any event proposal, the team may get in touch with some suggestions or amends where appropriate.

This could be anything from a small tweak to your event description, to selecting a different time slot if your first-choice clashes with another event aimed at a similar audience.

In some instances, the team might get in touch to offer up some thoughts on the event content, or make suggestions as to how your event could better align with the Leeds Digital Festival brand and the programme of events already confirmed.

Determined to ace the review stage? Here's a few things to bear in mind before submitting your event:

### Is Your Event Accessible and Inclusive?

At Leeds Digital Festival we're committed to breaking down the barriers to Digital Accessibility because we believe tech is for everyone.

We're starting with our own online spaces - which will be seeing an accessibility overhaul in the coming months - and as an LDF host you'll be expected to

introduce suitable measures to your event (virtual or physical) to ensure it can be accessed by anyone who'd like to attend.

Access requirements vary from person to person and between different event formats. So, someone with severe hearing loss, for example, could have very different access needs to an attendee who is neurodiverse.

The best way for you to make sure your attendees' access requirements are met is to go straight to the source and ask them what they need from you. By asking for these requirements in advance, you can make sure that the relevant measures are in place and that all attendees can engage comfortably. If you're holding a physical event and there are restrictions at the venue, please make them very clear on the booking form, e.g. 'Not wheelchair accessible'. Even better, find a venue that is.

Sites like Eventbrite make the process of receiving access requests incredibly simple. You'll just need to enable this option on the booking form, so that attendees can provide details of their requirements when registering for the event.

If you're hosting a virtual event, both Zoom and Microsoft Teams offer a live captioning feature. This provides a cost-effective way to improve the event experience for people with hearing impairments; or if you'd like to go a step further, you could employ a BSL interpreter to sign your presentation – like our friends at ASDA did for the April festival. Providing copies of your slides to attendees in advance of the event is another simple and effective way of improving accessibility, and one we'd recommend all event hosts consider.

Once you've confirmed attendee requirements, you can tailor the event format to ensure suitability. If you have questions or concerns about the accessibility of your event, please contact the Leeds Digital Festival team who'll be able to advise further or put you in touch with the relevant organisations.

**When employing additional accessibility measures for the first time, we strongly recommend conducting a run-through to ensure the experience for contributors and the audience is as stress-free as possible.**

## Diversity Matters

Does your event reflect the diverse nature of the tech sector, and the wider society we live in? It should.

Representation matters at all levels of industry and across all sectors, and by now we all know that diverse teams make successful teams. So there really is no excuse for submitting an event that doesn't offer up a range of perspectives, lived experiences and roles within tech.

Aside from the obvious benefit of allowing for a more well-rounded discussion, events that are representative of the diversity within the UK can also create wider appeal for the audience and encourage more sign-ups to your event. A diverse panel that features contributors of varying genders, races, ethnicities, ages and seniority level also sends the message to attendees that your company cares about promoting a diverse workplace, which can be beneficial if one of the goals of your involvement in the Festival is expanding your talent pool.

## Variety is the Spice of Life

Does your event have a varied mix of speakers? A common mishap for companies when planning speaking engagements is looking too close to home for contributors. Sure, you want to guarantee that the discussion remains relevant to your organisation, but that doesn't mean you should only feature speakers from your own company!

Why not ask some of your suppliers, customers, partner organisations or even competitors to feed into the discussion? This is a great way to add depth to your event without losing focus.

If you're looking to explore another angle and need help sourcing a few more speakers for your event, you can get in touch with the LDF team and we'll do our best to match you with appropriate contributors. Each year we open up a Speaker Form for tech professionals looking to get involved in the festival but not necessarily wanting to host their own event. And though we can't guarantee that we'll be able to align every speaker with an appropriate event, we do our best to play matchmaker!

## Covid Compliance

As the UK Government's lockdown roadmap continues to roll out, and restrictions surrounding public gatherings ease, our hope is that, come September, we'll be able to include some physical events in the Leeds Digital Festival programme.

With that said, any event organisers hoping to host physical events will need to ensure that their event is Covid-compliant, adheres to Government Guidelines, and has the relevant safety measures in place for the event to go ahead safely and legally. It is the responsibility of individual event hosts to ensure that their event format meets Government Guidelines at the time of hosting.

Nobody knows what September will hold, so whilst we are hopeful and happy to accept submissions for physical events, we ask that organisers are flexible with event planning given the uncertainty the past year has thrown at us all.

## Promoting Your Event

As an LDF event host you'll have access to our captive audience of tech-heads, and your inclusion in the Festival programme means you'll also benefit from our in-house marketing activities. But when it comes to telling people about your event, you'll be expected to conduct your own promotional activity too.

As well as listing all events on our website, in the lead up-to the Festival we'll be pushing out regular organic content across our social media, website, and blog. We'll also be rolling out a paid social and PR strategy where we'll be able to spotlight some of the exciting events taking place at the festival. In previous iterations this has included working with regional and national press outlets like The Yorkshire Post, Prolific North, businessdesk, Insider, Business Cloud and more to spread the word about what the Festival has in store.

Given the volume of events the September programme will include, we can't promise that every single event will receive individualised content, but we'll do our best to ensure that a broad range of events are promoted throughout the campaign duration. One way to ensure that your event makes it onto the LDF channels is to create your own content for the team to repost. In previous years, we've found that those hosts who regularly share engaging online content

around their event, generally benefit from higher sign-ups and attendance levels, so it pays to shout about your LDF involvement!

## Any questions?

Any questions? If you've made it this far and still need some extra guidance, feel free to send your questions over to the Leeds Digital Festival team on:

[admin@leedsdigitalfestival.org](mailto:admin@leedsdigitalfestival.org)