

# Small Business Networking in the Time of COVID-19: Lessons for the Defense Industry

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If you're a small business in the defense industry during the pandemic, you've probably noticed some major shifts in the way the industry has had to network. While meeting someone face-to-face and shaking their hand was formerly the best way to do business at conferences and events, virtual events are now the norm, and there are tons of them, since there is relatively low overhead involved in hosting a virtual event.

Small businesses, primes, and government entities have been regularly hosting and promoting virtual events online. What are they all about, and how can your online presence help you forge a useful connection in the age of COVID-19? This overview is meant to assist you in strengthening your online presence for virtual events.

## Virtual Events for Small Businesses and the Defense Industry

Before COVID-19, there were certain events you had to attend if you wanted to make the right connections. The one-on-one meeting, the handshake, and a face-to-face conversation was essential to establish trust and understanding between small business innovators and government decisionmakers.

The best place to find virtual events is on the LinkedIn platform, especially if you're already connected with defense industry influencers and program managers. The following resources also contain frequently updated information about virtual defense industry events:

- [Navy FST website](#)
- [Department of the Navy Office of Small Business Programs LinkedIn Page](#)
- [Navy Forum for SBIR/STTR Transition \(FST\) LinkedIn Page](#)
- [NavalX LinkedIn Page](#)

Since the start of the pandemic, several defense industry events have moved online for safety. Some businesses and government organizations have also taken advantage of this opportunity to create virtual events, expanding their audiences. Keep an eye out on platforms like LinkedIn where events frequently get posted and discussed. Track your keywords on LinkedIn to make sure you're up to date.

## Zoom Fatigue

During the pandemic, many of us have used peer-to-peer video networking platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, and Google Meet to meet face to face. It's useful to know who you're doing business with, and video conferencing creates a genuine connection. It can instill trust.

[Zoom Fatigue](#) describes the emotional stress of having to appear on video in a large number of face-to-face meetings online. The remedy? Stick to phone calls or make it clear that your meetings will occur voice only unless it is especially important.

Zoom meetings also tend to drag on. You can reduce the amount of time you spend on Zoom by setting a clear agenda just as you would for a regular in-person meeting.

Additionally, when networking within the defense industry, know that many governments, government contractors, primes, and industry-related businesses [have banned Zoom](#) due to security concerns. Unless you're operating on Zoomgov, use another platform.

## Consider Search Terms and Inbound Marketing

At in-person events, isn't it grand when the people you want to speak to come to you? There's good news: you can also accomplish this online, and it's not just about being loud and ever-present on social media. It's about inbound marketing, a concept developed for online use by the company HubSpot.

Through inbound marketing, you can get those parties to come to you. It works like this: populate your website with relevant, useful, keyword-rich information, and your audience will find you because they search for this type of content on Google. Marketers may lead you to believe that selecting your keywords and identifying them can be a hefty process, but if you're in a specialized niche, you probably already know most of your keywords. What would someone look up to find the technology you produce?

While inbound marketing often focuses on Google, remember that social media sites and even online retailers are search engines. Websites such as LinkedIn and Amazon succeed because they have accurate and user-friendly search options.

If you're especially ambitious and have the resources, you can create a niche virtual event yourself. It doesn't have to be massive—it could include just a few speakers and a question and answer session. By getting attendees to register, you're capturing their names, organizations, and email addresses so you can follow up with them later. Plus, you get great visibility and publicity for hosting the event virtually.

Are you interested in finding useful events and connections on social media during the pandemic? Connect with Navy STP and Navy FST on social media and [check out the Navy FST website](#) for the latest update on virtual events.