**Ok Zoomer...**

*third draft*

*Performance insights for the online magician*

Gideon Livnah

## Thank you

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# Introduction

In my plenty spare time during the Coronavirus lockdown, I picked up Ken Weber’s amazing book “Maximum Entertainment” book to re-read it. It has always been my bible. It breaks down entertainment in a way anyone can understand and apply to their show. If you don’t own it – find a way to get it, and read it more than once. Many ideas here will not have existed if not for it. While I was re-reading it, it hit me how much our craft has to change for the new medium the pandemic as forced us into. How many rules and facts no longer apply for online shows, and how many still are be must be adapted.

As a professional performer magic is my livelihood. It is my sole source of income. I also need magic for myself, it's something I crave for my soul. If my clients were to know how much I needed to do their events, they would have destroyed me when we would get to the part of the negotiations of my fee. After two weeks in lockdown, I was experiencing withdrawal symptoms from my addiction to performing, and then the chance to do online shows came up. I was skeptical at first, but an agent shot three gigs in one day towards my way and I had to think fast if I wanted to get paid. I put a makeshift online interactive show together and sat down in my living room doing 3 full shows. After I was done I sat down and felt the adrenaline settling down after about 4 hours of being in “performance mode”. That was only after two weeks off magic, what a junkie. but I was completely satisfied this is a way to do what I love most.

A day after the shows I received 3 emails from all clients on how surprisingly pleased they were with the very positive feedback they got from the audience. So, my satisfaction was real and theirs was too, that means online shows are a real thing now. What a time to be alive. After I popped my cherry, it was time to make my online show better.

But what is an online show?

*“Any performance of magic in front of a camera, broadcasted by the performer via internet by a variety of online computer programs to an audience of viewers isolated from the performer and their selves”*

The italics and the quotation marks make it look sophisticated but it’s really not rocket science. Online shows are not new to the Coronavirus age, but have gained a lot of popularity since the breakout, because now it’s all we have. My theory is that when we go back to normal, online shows will continue to be in demand because the world has had a taste of the practicality of social and business meetings online. More events will be held this way leaving a need for online entertainers. There is close-up magic, parlor magic, stage, standup and now – online magic. So, I hope this booklet will be relevant post Covid-19.

Personally, I think online shows are great. I mean, it will never be the same as performing for a live audience, I guess online shows are to real life shows as is pornography to real sex – it will never be the same, but when it’s all you have, it gets the job done.

Also, the free ones are usually bad, you have to pay to see the good ones.

Before we begin, you must want to know,  
Who the hell am I?

I’m nobody. Nothing in my life has prepared for this. We have been locked down for just a bit more than a month whilst I write this. This is uncharted territory. I have no idea what the hell I am doing and I wrote this booklet from online show to online show, Learning as I go, analyzing recorded shows and shows of peers, learning from mistakes and trying to figure it all out.

But still: my name is Gideon Livnah, I am a mentalist, magician and comedian from Israel. I am 31 years old and have been performing magic over half my life. I have a B.A. in communications studies and I think that for the first time in history it will be used for something, in order to understand how society and technology will force magic to create a new performance style. Exciting.

I hope enjoy reading and benefit from this booklet.

# The Ups and Downs

A lot of people look down on Zoom shows saying that they are not the same as real shows. They think magic is not meant to be performed alone in front of camera. Well magic isn’t meant to be performed at Bar Mitzvas either, but we do it anyway.

Some argue that it will never be like live shows. Of course, it’s not the same. The same way close up is different from parlor and stage. This is why we have to ADAPT to the new performing style. However, in order to put together an online show you must understand the limitations of this type of technology on magic while simultaneously appreciating its strengths.

**The Downs:**

You are alone:   
Usually, it’s just you doing tricks in front of a computer. It can get lonely when you don’t have feedback. Nobody to applaud your tricks and laugh at your jokes. As performers we associate silence with death on stage, and the lack of feedback in online shows reminds us of that. We like to have our ego fed, so I have to disclose the fact that unfortunately online shows will not indulge our mild narcissism as performers.

The audience is very, very, very far away from you:   
No assistant to inspect your props, shuffle decks, tear papers… nothing. All actions with your props must be done by you. And you can’t touch the props that the spectator handles on their side. The performer is physically isolated from the spectators and vice versa. That also means spectators cannot physically interact with themselves. You can only give instructions verbally.

The frame of your video is limited:  
This means any spontaneous moves of yourself or your props will be cut by the frame and invisible to your audience. If by accident you take your prop out of the frame, people might suspect something fishy has happened. No stage to run around energetically. Misdirection is also almost out of play because the camera does not blink or move according to your directions. There are ways people can record your shows and play them back, giving away certain secrets. Of course, the medium may suggest video trickery might be used to achieve magic, even if it's not the case.

You are limited to where your internet connection is (home):  
You are tethered to the limit of you WiFi or Ethernet cable, and power outlet. You are dependent on third parties for the technical smoothness of your show: Your own internet connection, the participants' internet connections and the servers of the platform you use. Pixelated videos, shaky Wi-Fi and spontaneous disconnections from the network can kill your show and there is not much you can do about it. You could also have a sudden power out in your area or in your home where the washing machine and dryer were working in unison. The use of cameras and lighting and production equipment increases the odds of some kind of technical failure that might stop the show.

Limited methods and effects:  
Because of the physical limitations, sleight of hand in no longer a main method we can use. Let that sink in for a second. The bread and butter of magic methods is almost obsolete in online shows. You can still use slights sparingly to present an effect to the camera, like a color change or coin productions, but forget about forcing, peaking, controls of chosen cards. Also, no gimmicks that rely on any kind of physical interaction with the audience. Because the methods are limited, so are the effects, and you will see magicians using the same tricks, this is a problem we have in real life shows, but the reasons in live shows is laziness, and in online show – lack of variety.

**The Ups:**

You are alone:  
Well, seemingly alone. You can have a secret assistant very close to you to help you out. You don’t have hecklers anymore because they are not there to kill your flow, and if they try – mute them. Kids playing up and causing a fuss? Mute those little f\*ckers. It can feel like you are God. Being alone can also be a lesson for us, we should not be so dependent upon feedback, even in our regular shows. It is indeed important to listen to our audience, but we must learn to be confident enough in ourselves to speak and present without being needy of a pat on the back or for someone to say "Good Job".

Being physically alone does not mean you cannot create intimacy with the audience – due to the fact that you can control who speaks this allows you to interact with whomever you'd like to on the livestream and form intimate and deep connections with the aid of just simple conversation. There is something charming about make real connections with real people over the internet, I mean this in the context magic, of course. There is no need to send unsolicited nude photos!

The audience is very, very, very far away from you:  
This means geography in no longer an obstacle between you and your client. You can perform anywhere in the the world without booking flights or hotels. This makes local markets a thing of the past. We are now working worldwide as a default. This means more potential gigs for you, but also more competition. Well, I don’t like to call it competition, I like to think of it as just more friends that I can refer more work to when I get overbooked, and more friends who could do the same for me.

The frame of your video is limited  
Goodbye angle problems! You are now in complete control of what your audience sees. You can set the camera in any way you wish to hide secret methods. You can secretly perform methods out of frame or have a secret assistant easily pass you things mid-stream. You have complete control of aesthetics and the composition of you frame, lighting and sound. No more arguing with event planners on tech specs – it all you now.

You are limited to where your internet connection is (home):  
Congratulations. You now work from home. Again – no travel time to limit the amount of shows you book. Theoretically you can perform 24\7 and book shows like a doctor books appointments. This means you have less expenses: you make shows cheaper for the client and still yield the same income for yourself, or - charge the same and make more money. Anyway, forget being on the road and have more time to spend with your loved ones.

Limited methods and effects:  
I think my shtick made its point: Every negative can be a positive. Well almost any negative. But having a very limited amount of methods still sucks. We know we can’t use a lot of things but what CAN we use?

Gimmicks that you yourself manipulate, mathematical principles, technology, psychological principles and angle-based illusions because you have complete control of the camera. As I said you can still perform sleight of hand manipulations, but my opinion is that their value decreases because of the video format and I do not recommend them to act as the center piece of your show.

Some effects become much stronger over the internet even stronger than in real life, because the distance between you and the participant increases the impossibility of the effect. If you know someone’s card in real life, well you could have seen it. But if you know the identity of card of someone who happens to be on the other side of the world, now that can be considered a miracle.

The greatest positive thing about having a limited amount of methods, is that it is stimulating to our creativity. I know it can sound a bit tacky but bear with me: We know that necessity is the mother of invention. I think the technical limitations of online shows provide fertile ground for sprouting new and original concepts in the art of magic. I am genuinely excited to see the things that pop up.

# Letting go of the Crutches

As performers, we all have our habits. These are the things we do on and off stage that help us set the mood for the show. Things we were taught as dogma in performance, and lessons we learned through our journey in magic that made our real life shows better. In order to succeed in the online show market, you are going to have to be open about parting ways with some of these old habits.

Online shows are a new concept for us, besides letting old habits die, I found there are other talents and traits we could summon that could make virtual performances smooth and enjoyable for the performer and spectators. And yes, some of them are the complete opposite to what we learned and practiced our whole careers.

Spare the applause ques  
On most platforms we cannot collect immediate feedback in the form of applause or laughter. In real life we were taught to leave pauses and space for the audience to react to our magic. This is pointless on online shows. If you try to synthetically recreate the energy of your stage show online, you might have a hard time and the result would be mostly be awkward and unnatural for you and the viewers at home. Don’t try to pump up an audience of people sitting alone at their homes in pajamas and expect them to go bonkers for your coins across routine.

You can acknowledge the fact that you can’t see them and encourage them to react via chat and replies. I do this in the beginning in the form of comedy and do an “applause test” and ask them to send emojis when they like something. Remember Michael Close’s “Just give me one of these OK signs”? Who knew his joke will be our reality?

Don’t tell jokes – make conversations.   
For the same reason as the latter principal – you don’t have feedback. Any joke you tell will feel like its bombing when no one laughs. If you present jokes like you would in your live shows, as in waiting for your audience to react, you might keep waiting for a long time. We are used to associating silence with death on stage, and that subliminal connection may have an impact on our energy levels whilst performing. Let it go. As for applause and laughs – they do happen sometimes in online shows, but it's completely okay if you don’t see people losing their sh\*t when you perform. When you watch fail videos on YouTube alone before bed – do you LOL?

What I do is script my comedy into a conversation I have with a chosen spectator before or during a trick. Just talk to him like a human being, and causally slip material into the conversation. Comedians do this naturally when they check jokes and stories before stage. It will seem natural and authentic, like you adlibbed it mid conversation. The response from the person you are talking to will project the energy to the viewers. This is similar to the vibe of “crowd work” in standup comedy.

The Radio Host Theory  
Because the main obstacle is lack of immediate feedback, I tend to address the audience very little. Instead the audience experiences the plots and premises of my routines through my conversations with the volunteers I use. It’s ok to talk to the audience as a collective between tricks, but when doing a trick that involves a spectator, create a personal conversation that naturally segues into a trick. Forget about the audience and be present in the conversation with your new friend.

Think of it as close-up magic meets radio: radio has a rhythm: the DJ talks to the listeners (no feedback), puts a caller on, has some small talk, then plays his song request. Replace song requests with tricks and you have close up magic. Close up magic in my opinion is the art of sneaking magic into small talk. The setting in online shows is a bit more formal than close up magic, thus the comparison to radio. It hard to say this but you have to tone down your performance mode and talk like a regular human being. You can still be energetic, and if you have an established persona see how you can tweak it to suit this atmosphere.

If you stop trying to perform, and imagine yourself as a radio host, managing a program that is broadcasted, talking to people and doing tricks for them, it will give your online performance a more intimate feeling, give more authority, sincerity and charisma.

Production Value  
In regular shows we usually like to play as big as possible. My opinion is that over production in online shows sends a bad message that may hurt our magic. It’s a must to have professional sound, video and lighting, but most of your viewers are at home in their living rooms with slippers. When you dress to an event as a performer, you always go one step over the other gusts: if its casual - wear a blazer. If they have button shirt wear a suit. Everyone in suit? wear a tux…

On the same note, I like my production setting to be just a bit better than the viewer. I have seen a lot of performers with fancy backgrounds, green screens and decorations. I understand the appeal of using them, to try to imitate the setting of a real-life show. I don’t think you should imitate a real-life show. I try not to use professional backdrops, equipment that might suggest I’m in a professional studio with someone other than yourself “helping”. I do my shows in my living room, library or home office. Of course, it’s important to have good composition of the frame that’s organic to your home setting (tidy up you living rooms!). If your house or office is not photogenic, then the second-best option is a one-color neutral background or backdrop. But it is still a compromise in my opinion.

And please… pretty please – DON’T PUT ANY GRAPHICS ON YOUR STREAM. That go’s for logos, green screens, any fancy picture in picture that isn’t organic to the platform or any sort of augmentations to the live stream, multiple camera angles that cut to each other mid-stream... This could suggest that are using trick photography to achieve the magical effect. In this medium the audience is more likely to suspects this anyway. Using any fancy video tricks could confirm this, even if not true at all and you use no such thing to achieve magic. It might look great but it will kill your magic. Even if you are quite proficient in video production – hide this ability from your audience. It’s like doing card flourishes, its eye candy but it says that you can use it to trick them. Bad.

# Maximum Zoomertainmet

Its not a secret this booklet is inspired by Ken Weber’s master piece, “Maximum Entertainment”. I will never be able to obtain the depth the he goes into in his book. This is no substitute for his book. As I said it before and I will say it again: make sure you have a copy of his book. Then again, make sure you have two copies of his book: one to scribble thoughts and annotation in, and anther to keep clean on your shelf.

Now, after the subtle “please don’t sue me Ken” paragraph, I would like to briefly plagiarize one of the most important concepts in his book, and re-imagine them for the age of online shows. Just as an academic practice. I am referring to Ken Weber’s “Six Pillars of Entertainment”. Please don’t sue me Ken.

**1 – Master your craft**  
Ken says that “*without technical proficiency, all else fails*” he speaks about the techniques of magic. I will take it is a given you know how to perform magic well.

In online shows, practice and master the technical aspects required to operate the platform you use: be it Zoom, Facebook, Instagram, etc.… make sure you know how to use is well. This might sound obvious, but nothing is more awkward than technical hiccups that ruin the rhythm of the program. Make sure you know how to open and close mic’s and cameras, create a panel of viewers for multi assistant effects, create breakout rooms for preshow work, insert slides and screen shares. These things should be done smoothly as your double lift and pass. Practice and rehearse them accordingly and PAY FOR THE PRO PLANS. If you have a means to get a technical assistant – make sure you rehearse together.

**2 – Communicate your humanity**

I spoke about a similar subject in the radio host theory. But don’t try to over perform to compensate for the lack of feedback. Talk like a regular human being. When people parody magic, they lampoon the fake authoritative tone a magician uses to give instructions because it’s cliché and insincere. On Online shows this becomes even more awkward because everyone knows you are at home alone. You can still create a magical experience for people, just tone it down to the proportions that are suitable for the setting. There is no room to read, just be yourself and have real conversation with people that magic just spontaneously happens during them.  
It’s important to live the moment in the conversation, always make time to acknowledge the comments and reactions of the rest of the viewers on your live stream. People will feel more connected and inclined to keep participating.

Don’t make fun of people's bad internet connection. There is nothing more helpless then lack of Wi-Fi. Be empathetic to their situation and move on to a participant that has a better connection. For some reason people take this personally.

Ken talks about eye contact. This is impossible due to the fact that there are no eyes to contact, and looking directly into the camera is not always practical. Plus, if you stare constantly at the camera it will feel really weird and violating for the viewers. In acting lessons, I was taught to look a bit behind or next to the camera, that makes an intimate vibe but not creepy. Here is a neat way to do this with a webcam on top of your screen: I make sure that on my computer screen, the window showing myself performing is a bit small, and a place in on my screen on top, directly under were my camera is. This way I can monitor the stream and have subtle “eye” contact with the camera. Instagram live does this automatically because your square is always on top near the camera.

**3 - Capture the excitement**

This is not the time to play your tricks down. Its important to speak naturally like a human. But if a trick succeeds when the spectator is hundreds of miles away from you – it's completely legitimate response for you to express the emotions you want your viewers to experience.

When I perform the nail writer on zoom, I react before I show I got the right number, because my inner text is that I am shocked that this actually worked over the internet.

In short, don’t rely on the audience’s reactions because they are nonexistent. Supply your own reactions that will enhance the effect. Try to do this without over acting keeping it authentic in the eyes of the viewers.

**4 – Control every moment** *and* **5 – Eliminate weak spots**

In a regular show people who get bored escape into their cell phones. When someone get bored in your online show – they silently leave. Make sure to monitor how many viewers you have and keep having and use it as a reference as to where your weak spots are. Try to analyze what happened or didn’t happen at that time that made people leave.

The technical aspects of operating an online show may slow you down. Like Pillar #1, make sure you master using your digital platform. Getting people on and off air, sharing screens and trasitioning into effects should be done as smoothly as possible. Dealing with technical issues is dead time, it is inevitable, but do your best to keep it to a minimum.

Do not waist time apologizing and explaining technical hiccups or if a trick doesn’t work. They don’t care. Get on with the program.

**6 – Build to a climax**

Attention spans are getting shorter and shorter, especially on the internet. My real-life show run for 60-75 minutes. My online shows play best at 25-35 minutes. I have heard of performs who to more than that, but that’s me. You don’t want to overstay your welcome. But I do want to over deliver the hell out of those 30 minutes with very strong material.

The viewers don’t care about technical limitations. They want strong magic tricks routined in sequence to a grand finale. The old dogma is start strong and end strong, and put something in the middle. Bad for online. You need every trick to be great and for that we need to dig into material for online shows.

Like any show variety is king. A lot of “hands off” type effect that are practical for long distance performance are predictions. You have just prediction type effects this could become very monotones. If you do any manipulation type routines, the audience cannot inspect or see them in real life, this diminishes their value and means they must be exceptionally interesting to engage your audience, be honest with yourself before you put them in your online show. A lot of manipulation routines do not engage the audience actively, and the audience might as well be watching prerecorded magic trick on YouTube. You want to use as few of these type of effects as possible. Watching amazing coin productions is entertaining in real life because the viewer being physically present increases the impossibility. This is nonexistent in the medium of video.   
When choosing material try to think what effects add the value that what you are doing is live. If you choose an effect that theoretically can be pre-recorded, it probably is best not to put it in your online show even if it is visually stunning. If you must do these types of routines, think how you can change them to incorporate an element the proves that what is happing is real time, one time, especially just for this crowd.   
If you perform an effect with a long counting, calculating procedure of just have to move around a lot in order to force a result -make sure that you involve the entire audience and not just the one spectator or the rest will be bored to death.   
Don’t try to force old material from your regular show – pick material that the medium does not harm – but amplifies.

As for the finish, well it’s on you to find that piece that knocks them out. Ken says you must find a piece that is completely different then the rest of your show. I close my online shows with a variation on Haim Goldenberg “CamFabulation” that I set up in the beginning of the show. This gives the ending meaning because of the anticipation from the set up. Please refer to “Maximum Entertainment” for more depth on closing shows because it is very relevant for any kind of performance including online.

# It’s Zoom Time

A lot of magicians have chosen Zoom as a platform to perform online because it is user friendly on both ends, widely used already, and practical to manage audience members. As of writing this booklet I mostly use *Zoom* to perform online, so it is the default platform for me to explain ideas. I hope you will be able to easily adapt to the platform you use. As technology changes fast, please keep in mind the present time I am writing this and be open to changes that might be relevant in the future.

I put this segment towards the end of the booklet because it is super technical and may bore you to death if you are not familiar with *Zoom*. Do not skip it because I have some good stuff here. I will try to be clear as a can in explaining the ideas, but if you are lost, watch some YouTube videos or tutorials a about *Zoom*, and come back. I’m sure it will make more sense.

***Zoom*** has two main settings: *meeting* mode, and *webinar* mode.   
On *meeting* mode every *participant* is equal and can be seen and heard if not *muted* by the *host*.   
On *webinar* mode, *attendees* cannot speak or be heard, but a *panel* of participants can be chosen by the host to be viewed and heard by attendees.   
The default on both settings is that the camera stream automatically cuts to a *speaker* as they speak, unless the host chooses one speaker to be *spotlighted.* When on *spotlight*, all speakers can be heard but only the spotlighted *participant’s* camera can be seen on the live stream.   
On both setting there is a *chat* were anyone can reply, and a “*raise hand*” feature that can be used in order to get the host's attention.

As said, I will not be teaching the technical aspects of zoom, but I do want you to be familiar with the jargon I use so you can adapt it to your platform. You can refer to this list any time whilst reading if you need clarification or context:

***Zoom*** – the program I use to broadcast my shows on the internet

***Meeting*** – the default mode for talking with *participants.*

***Participant*** *–* individuals who take part in ameeting via a computer, smartphone or tablet.

***Host \ Cohost*** *–* the *participant* that has admin control of the meeting. Usually yourself or a technical assistant. A co-host has similar abilities as *host*, but a bit more restricted.

***Mute all \ Unmute all*** - the hosts options to open and close *participants* microphones*.*

***Gallery view*** – the individual’soption to view the *Meeting* in a window that contains multiple smaller videos of other *participants*

***Speaker view*** - the individual’soption to view the *Meeting* in a window that contains one large video of the *participant that is currently speaking.*

***Spotlight*** *–* the host’s option to freeze the speaker view on a single *participant* or himself

***Breakout room*** – A separate room inside the main meeting where the host can invite *participants* to talk privately*,* or split them into groups.

***Waiting room*** – a temporary room a participant is sent to in the beginning of a *meeting* until the host approves him to the meeting.

***Share screen*** – a *participant’s* or *host’s* option to switch his live stream from the camera, to a different window on his computer like a slideshow for example.

***Chat*** – a place all *participants* can write comments and replies.

***Attendee*** – a passive *participant* in *webinar* mode

***Panelist*** – an active *participant in webinar* mode

In my opinion *Zoom* is currently the most versatile platform to livestream magic. But it is made for personal and business meetings, and not tailored for the needs of the online performer. It’s not perfect, but right now it’s all we have. I do hope a platform tailored for performance pops up some day.

Here is how I like to manage my *Zoom* shows, I like to use *meeting mode*, but some of my friends prefer *webinar mode*. Both have their pros and cons. Just keep in mind this is how I use *meeting mode*:

Preshow:  
I book the gig, set the time and date, and schedule a *Zoom meeting*. I send the links to the emails of the *participants* I have received from the booker. I choose some emails and send a message to schedule a “technical meeting” of 5 minutes with a few random *participants* a day or two before show time. This allows me to check they have all the computer programs needed to join my live stream. I know this probably sounds like B.S., but here’s the thing – it is. I really use this as a way to obtain some preshow work for some of my mentalism effects.

Before showtime:   
I schedule the *meeting* about 15 minutes before showtime. This allows the *participants* to come online and join the stream. I make sure to disable the *waiting room* so I don’t need to manually approve each *participant.*In this time, I do something filthy and diabolical, please don’t judge me: a lot of people write their names on *Zoom* and you can see them openly, I locate two or three on Facebook and make note of their birthdays or any other meaningful information I can scavenge. You can incorporate this information in card tricks, mind reading tricks, cold\hot reading or anything else. Use multiple birthdays and phone numbers to randomly generate a new number that you have predicted. The possibilities are endless but this must be done subtly, with more layers to hide the dirty work. Just do not make it obvious you looked them up, and find a way to organically bring them in play during a show.

Before show time there are about 10 minutes to kill before everyone comes online. I leave the microphones on and let people mingle. In this time, you can open a *breakout room* and invite any *participant* you want to join there and speak to them privately, then you can continue to get more preshow work done right before show time.

Show time:  
My technical setup is very simple: I have a professional hand-held microphone on a boom stand, basic lighting, I sit down on a chair during my broadcast, the camera has a static medium shot of my upper body, and the background is my living room or my office. Tidy.

As said, as people take their seats in the *meeting* I leave their mics on so they can talk and mingle. The program begins with me, the *host* *muting* all microphones, opening mt microphone and camera, and doing an introduction. I explain the premise of my show and acknowledge the fact I cannot hear their reactions and propose a new way to react: I point out the *chat* option and tell them that if I did some magic that surprised them, instead of applauding alone at their home, they can send a “?!?!” or write any funny comment they wish in the chat box, and you promise to read the funny ones. I say “let’s do a reaction test” and perform a quick visual trick and encourage them to reply in the chat, reading the funny comments as they come. This is the last time I acknowledge the lack of feedback, I will read a comment during the show if it added any value.   
The last technical direction I give the participants is the fact there is a *gallery view*, and *speaker view* and I will direct them to switch these view options during the show to maximize the impact of some effects. I start the show directing them to all use *speaker view*. I then *spotlight* myself. When I bring a *participant* I either cancel my *spotlight* or turn it over to them, depending on the effect. In a regular conversation where no magic is happening I take off the spotlight completely and let the camera automatically cut to whoever is speaking.

I pick volunteers pretty much the same way I would in a show. I see who has their camera on and seems engaged in the show. I never declare I am look for someone to help me in a trick. I say “I’m looking for someone to talk with us…”. First of all, this is true. I always make small talk with people because that is probably what makes watching a live magic show different than just seeing magic videos on YouTube. Its proof of that I am present and what is happening is real and live. But mostly, I check to see if my spectator will be a good one, and if they are not, I thank them for their time and pick a new one.

Note: In the desktop client of Zoom you can record your shows with videos and audio inside the meeting. Don’t forger to record every show and review it.

**Super important note**: Always *spotlight* where the climax of an effect is happing. You never want the revelation to be cut by *Zoom's* artificially intelligence movie director because in could cut to *speaker view* to someplace else. If you do something amazing- put the *spotlight* on yourself. If the *participant* does something amazing, or his reaction\confirmation is the base for the climax – *spotlight* him\her!

Post show:  
After the finale and parting monologue, I close my camera and microphone but do not end the *meeting*... I open everyone’s microphone and let people talk among themselves about what they just experienced. Ever wanted to be a fly of the wall after you leave the stage? Now you can. If you remembered to push record, you also have amazing and authentic quotes and testimonials to use. Make sure to get the proper permission from them if you do use it.  
Because I invited my audience by email, I now have everyone’s email addresses. I send out a thank you email for participating in my show, ask them for feedback and show them were they can publicly recommend my show to others. Also, letting them know I would like to keep in touch in the future.

# Magic Post Covid-19

Most of the booklet has dealt the impacts of technology on magic. But that is not the only force in play that we must learn to adapt to.

Social norms have changed many things in entertainment throughout the years. Things you could have said fifty years ago would be offensive today, jokes that made you laugh in the 80’s seem out dated, movies from 20 years ago seem slow and boring…

The Coronavirus has forced us into online shows, but when real life shows come back, if they come back, at least in the beginning, they will also have to adapt to the social norms of a post Coronavirus world.

I do not know how the world will be after the outbreak. But like how 9\11 changed security in airports forever, I think the Coronavirus crisis will change hygiene etiquette. I have no idea to what extent and for how long. This part of the booklet is trying to predict and plan for the most extreme scenarios. I think it is best to start planning now on how to change our real life shows according to worst possible reality, and then readjust it as things start to further improve. That is, if they ever do.

I think Corona will impact live performances in these two main ways:

Social distancing:   
Don’t count on crowded conventions and packed theatres any time soon. Even if allowed, I don’t believe people will be inclined to attend mass events. We must get used to the idea of smaller scaled events with less people. Smaller events usually mean smaller budgets. Bummer, I know.

Social distancing also means the physical space between people is bigger. Right now, 6 feet is what is acceptable. This might change, but imagine doing a show for 20 people sitting 6 feet away. Weird. Imagine inviting a spectator on stage and have them be no closer than 6 feet from you when interacting. Awkward.

People might want to produce events outdoors instead of indoors, so you might want to think what effects you can do in the open air and in windy conditions. Time to dust off your old busking gear.

Hygiene and Germaphobia:   
No more shaking hands when welcoming a volunteer. Although I have to say I am a big fan of the novel elbow shake and I think Corona has done some fabulous publicity for personal hygiene – people will be washing their hands more often and disinfecting them with alcohol. But the global panic of Covid-19 has had a toll on people’s anxiety regarding hygiene and raised it to state of Germaphobia.

The worst case is people wearing gloves and mask to our shows.

They may not want to touch your props, or be touched by you in anyway. No pens and billets to write that number they thought of, no card picking, no pickpocketing nor put-pocketing… and forget about card to mouth! Everything they handle must be their own or brand new.   
This is the most extreme case, I think that in reality if you will have a bottle of alcohol-based disinfectant, and you offer some to each volunteer before and after they help you, that will be acceptable and you can do most things as usual. But like I said – plan for the worst. If people told you a year ago you would be doing virtual shows for a living you wouldn’t have believed them.

Masks. After the early 2000's SARS outbreak, people living in Asia became more aware of wearing face masks as a social curtesy that could help prevent infections. We used to just make fun of them at airports, but now they are the ones having the last laugh, as they came into the facial mask business when it was on their turf. I think that in a post Corona world we will see more people wearing them around the world, and maybe everyone will wear them and you will find yourself performing to a room full of people in masks. Masks make people anonymous. And anonymous people do not behave like normal people. I don’t know if people will laugh and applaud the same way. Or maybe they will feel more open to the idea of heckling during your show. It takes a very quick trip to the YouTube comment section to see how anonymity can turn people into trolls.

These are all guesses. I am writing this in the month of April 2020. You might stumble upon this booklet in the far future and laugh at my paranoia. You might say I was ahead of my time. Maybe I got some of it right. I really don’t know. But if there is one thing I learned from this outbreak is that I will never be caught off guard again. I will not allow it to harm the way I enjoy life, but you bet your bottom dollar I will be putting money aside for a rainy day, and adapting my show real time to anything that gets thrown my way.

PS.

Don’t do Corona beer brand jokes and tricks. It was old the day they started doing them.

# The End. Please Read.

Well that’s about it. Because my experience with online shows is about as long as the Coronavirus outbreak in Israel, where I am based, I do plan on updating this booklet in the future and republishing it when I have more to add.

Thank you all for taking the time to read this booklet and I hope it will serve you well.

If you enjoyed it you can really help me out in a several ways:

Share it with your friends. There is a reason I put this out for free. I want to help people during this time.

If this booklet helped you, and you would like to help me as well, my PayPal account is written below, and you can send me any donation you feel comfortable with. Anything would be highly appreciated.

You can also email me at the same address with questions, tips, improvements, corrections or contribute new ideas. You can also just say hello, I am always happy to make new friends.

Zoom ya later,

Gideon Livnah

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# For Future Readers: A Message from the Past

April 13, 2020

Hello reader,

I do not know when in the future this booklet will find you. But I will describe our current reality to you as I experience it firsthand:

Late 2019 a new virus named Covid-19 (AKA Coronavirus AKA Corona) has plagued the earth in a global outbreak. Millions have been infected and hundreds of thousands have lost their lives. Most of the world is in voluntary or mandatory isolation in their homes. People cannot leave their house, meet friends, shake hands (we shake elbows now), stand closer than 6 ft (2 meters) apart, or gather together in groups larger than 3. Limitations vary from country to country, and every country has its own way to enforce and police them.

Besides the sick and dead, many businesses cannot operate, and have gone into debt, fired employs, or closed down. The economic crisis resulting from Covid-19 is still in play and we don’t know how and if it will get better, or how worse it will become.

If it isn’t obvious, the entire live entertainment industry has shutdown. As of writing these lines no kind of magic in person is socially\legally acceptable. Many people cannot perform their jobs in this situation and have lost the ability to provide for their families, but magicians cannot meet people and magic cannot be performed without an audience. So, our income and passion are dead. And we have no idea when things will return to normal.

Even when the virus is cured, we have no idea when people would be happy to gather in groups as an audience, how new social norms for hygiene will that will impact our magic, and what economic state our clients will be in to book entertainers.

To survive magicians and mentalists have to change profession, or adapt.

Very early in the lockdown magicians have started experimenting with online performances. Many have started creating single camera and multi camera studios in their homes so the can broadcast their show and interact with audience members via social networks like Facebook\ Instagram or and programs like Zoom, Google Hangouts etc.… some of these might be obsolete or ancient history when this booklet is read.

As like all history, an entrance of a new medium sets new rules to apply to, and in performing arts, changes truths about entertainment that were dogma before it. The variety of methods to accomplish magic is limited greatly by this technology. we have to find new ways to make the audience engage, experience magic and believe the performer. We must set a new standard in performing that is tailored to the social and physical limitations of our new reality.

Like Darwin’s survival of the fittest, the performer in the age of online shows must adapt or starve.

This is only the current truth, and this thing may or may not get better or get back to normal at any time. If they do get better, how will social changes post Covid-19 impact magic? A lot of uncertainty.

I do hope that the future when this is read in is much better, and maybe this entire booklet will be irrelevant in one year. But my guess is that online performances will remain “a thing”, and that is why entertainment theory regarding online shows must be separated from regular theory, and adapted according to the strengths and weaknesses of the medium in order to maximize the impact of magic.

I do hope the future is brighter, but the ideas in the booklet will be useful for you nonetheless.

Yours,

Gideon Livnah.