

# How This Adult Education Entrepreneur Did a 180 in the Pandemic

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How many times have you heard people say, "I can't wait for things to go back to the way they were before the pandemic."? I was one of those people, stuck in my ways and not wanting to face what would happen to my adult-education business, One Day University, if the world never went back to large in-person events.

But I came around and I couldn't be happier about it.

For the past 12 years, [One Day University](https://www.onedayu.com/) (<https://www.onedayu.com/>) ran live events for people across the country and Canada who wanted to "Go back to college — but just for one day." We packed hundreds of people, mostly aged 50+, in auditoriums, theaters and hotel ballrooms in New York, Florida, Texas, California and many more states.

We struck a nerve. Before the pandemic, One Day U had grown to offering lectures from 150 professors from 100 top colleges in 61 cities.

But a world where large crowds couldn't gather was a world that couldn't support our business. Or so I thought initially.

## Putting Things in Perspective in the Pandemic

As the world began to close down and people got sick, however, I realized I had to put things into perspective. My family was safe and healthy, and my business had an opportunity to pivot.

Through the [COVID-19](https://www.nextavenue.org/the-coronavirus-pandemic-what-you-need-to-know/) (<https://www.nextavenue.org/the-coronavirus-pandemic-what-you-need-to-know/>) brought upon individuals and businesses, I tried to focus on the reality that things could certainly be worse. In time, I became grateful for the opportunity to have the time to reimagine the future of One Day University.

For years, it had become increasingly clear to my business partner Kevin Brennan and me that the future of One Day University meant a transition to online learning. Of course, I never imagined it would take a global pandemic to kick our team into high gear and then deliver it to our customers.

We had known for some time that as the company had grown, so had our expenses. But because we were chugging along, we didn't take the time to innovate. That's pretty common among entrepreneurs.

The pandemic shutdown gave us the time and the kick in the pants that we needed. As the world hunkered down at home, my One Day U colleagues and I put our minds to work on how to deliver a world-class experience to people needing to be entertained in quarantine.

## Shifting From In-Person Classes to Virtual Ones

So, our professors began to lecture from their dens and living rooms across the country and people from all over the world started tuning in to be educated and connected to our new digital platform.

Instead of students coming to one place at a specified date and time, they could instead sign up online and watch the recorded lecture whenever they wanted and from wherever they were at the time.



This is not to say the transition was without major struggles. In the early days of the pandemic, One Day University had to cancel tickets, transition the business to virtual and communicate with our students — and prospective students — to make sure we had a business to save.

Thanks to the federal government's [PPP pandemic loans](https://www.nextavenue.org/how-some-home-business-owners-can-get-the-governments-new-ppp-loans/) (https://www.nextavenue.org/how-some-home-business-owners-can-get-the-governments-new-ppp-loans/) for small businesses, we were able to stay afloat while figuring out how to make everything work seamlessly online.

Along the way, I discovered that our team had talents just waiting to be discovered during this trying time. Our employees with very little background working with technology learned how to program and even write code. Our event planners learned to manage payables and receivables and analyze growth trends. Our newspaper print-ad designers mastered digital design skills. Our customer sales reps even learned to edit video clips.

Of course, our pivot raised many questions which needed to be addressed; I still think about them almost daily.

Would our One Day U adult students miss anything from not attending in person? Well...yes. Many of them have let us know that they used to enjoy meeting new people and discussing what they'd learned when they came to One Day University.

## How Things Changed for Students and for Us

But the pivot also turned out to be a plus for many One Day U students. The new virtual format has afforded them an entirely new level of flexibility. Now, they learn what they want, when they want, at their own speed. If they want to watch some of a lecture, then break for dinner and come back, they can.

We're also now charging students only a fraction of what they paid previously for live experiences. A typical live event ticket used to cost \$100+ per person. Now, you can pay \$8.95 a month or \$89 a year for five new live-streamed talks a week plus an unlimited access to our

entire video library of over 400 talks and a live Q&A with professors. And you can cancel anytime.

So, the economics of One Day U have changed rather drastically.

We're not back at the \$1 million per month in revenue we experienced in 2018 and 2019, but our expenses have drastically dropped. Airline fees, hotel fees, auditorium rental fees, taxi fees and meal reimbursement fees are now zero. Even office rent has been eliminated, since our staff now operates virtually with regular Zoom meetings and our employees are scattered everywhere.

Before the pandemic, we'd typically have 1,000 students attending an event at a time. Now, 40,000 pay us a monthly fee. This is obviously a very different model, and we're aiming to double members this year.

I've learned from the pandemic that our members, primarily age 50 to 75, are far more resilient and adept at mastering computers and smart phones than I (or maybe even they) ever expected. I suspect many have been helped by friends, children or grandchildren; but eventually, nearly everyone caught on.

## No Choice But to Keep Up

The internet has changed the world and there's really no choice but to keep up.

Regarding competition, there were always [lifelong learning](https://www.nextavenue.org/is-the-60-year-curriculum-the-future-of-learning/) (https://www.nextavenue.org/is-the-60-year-curriculum-the-future-of-learning/) groups across the country and nearly all of them have now gone virtual as we have. However, they tend to remain local, drawing audiences in their geographic area to see educators from there. We've been lucky enough to continue capturing the national stage for the country's very best top-tier professors from the finest colleges and universities.

As vaccines slowly return the "edutainment" world back to something closer to what we generally call "normal," the issue of One Day University's "returning to live" is still not entirely clear. We'll certainly reactivate that division somewhat when we can, but likely with fewer events in fewer cities than we targeted previously.

Digital growth is too exciting and captivating not to aggressively pursue. We're in it for the long run.

While many may be nostalgic for pre-pandemic times, I am looking forward — to a more optimistic view of a future, which includes innovations to experiences we once loved and still do.