



THE VITAL ROLE OF STAGING IN A NEW ERA OF LIVE EVENTS **Best Practices and Key Considerations for Post-Pandemic Spatial Planning**

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Due to the heavy impact of COVID-19 on the live events industry, spatial distancing will likely play a major role in how people attend sports competitions, theatrical productions, worship services, business conferences, classes and other in-person presentations in the coming months and years. In fact, it is quite possible that the pandemic will permanently alter the way we congregate and utilize public spaces and fundamentally re-shape future design planning.

Already, there have been dramatic changes in the way people gather in public. Instead of sitting shoulder-to-shoulder in a crowded cinema, we've seen the return of drive-in theaters with small groups watching the latest releases from the distanced protection of their automobiles. Live concerts have been replaced with streaming virtual performances; educational institutions have implemented hybrid models to allow for socially distanced learning; and churches and restaurants have moved their services outdoors – at least as long as weather permits. Sadly, many theaters and other performing arts organizations have been forced to cease activities. But, as the saying goes, “the show must go on” and venues of all types must find ways to continue operating if they are to survive.

Staging Concepts believes deeply that, especially right now, we need to cherish life experiences. We know many people share our great passion for sports and performing arts and we are working hard to create solutions that will help us all get back to the enjoyment and camaraderie of live events and activities as quickly and as safely as possible. In tandem with architects, designers, contractors and facility managers across the commercial building sector, we are re-thinking spatial planning with an eye for more open space that enables and encourages people to spread out.

Among the most noteworthy trends that has emerged as a result of the pandemic is heightened interest in modular solutions. Modularity and flexibility are proving to be critical considerations as facilities look to adapt their settings to accommodate new safety protocols. Facing an uncertain future, a growing number of specifiers are opting for non-permanent solutions that can be installed, tested and adjusted as needed based on evolving needs and criteria. These adaptable systems are also less costly than permanent options that require pouring concrete and can't be changed.

Modular Staging

Staging is becoming increasingly modular, not only for theaters but for churches, museums and hospitality settings as well. Historically used for temporary installations, [portable platforms](#) are being incorporated more commonly into permanent staging systems to enhance flexibility and

deliver long-term versatility. A great example of this can be found in the modular stage our team created for the [Museum of Modern Art](#) (MOMA) in New York City. The custom-engineered set of portable components allows for them to be assembled in 12 different configurations – ranging from proscenium and thrust to in-the-round – all using the same platforms and riser components.

Modular [stage extensions](#) also are in high demand, particularly among schools, worship facilities, hotels and resorts. From accommodating performances and business meetings to hosting baccalaureate services and wedding ceremonies, [portable platforms](#) offer a convenient and cost-effective way to expand any presentation area.

Stage extensions can be customized to serve the dynamic needs of any venue. To provide a larger space for holiday performances and scripture reenactments, Staging Concepts developed a custom stage extension for [Calvary Chapel](#) in Hemet, Calif. This expansion was primarily needed to accommodate an annual performance that features a large number of community members but has proven to be useful time and time again for this active church and has been instrumental in allowing the congregation to continue worshipping together.

Another attractive option for today's live event facilities is a [mobile stage](#). Built on retractable casters, these portable stages can be easily moved within a location completely assembled, saving both time and manpower. Staging Concepts recently designed a custom rolling stage system for [The Mission Ballroom](#), a new state-of-the-art concert and entertainment destination in Denver. Multiple rolling stages can be combined to create a larger performance area or expanded space for safe distancing. The system also features a 20' x 60' non-rolling thrust that can be added to the rolling system to create an expansive staging surface of 60' x 60'.

Flexible Seating

In light of spatial concerns, venues also are seeking flexible seating solutions that can be manipulated and reconfigured to safely serve a variety of gatherings. Designed with versatility in mind, [semi-permanent seating risers](#) can easily be set up in numerous configurations using the same components, making them ideal for optimizing sight lines and accommodating spacing requirements. These systems also enhance usability and profitability by enabling a facility to accommodate a range of different events and audiences.

For [Healy Theater at DePaul University](#) in Chicago, Staging Concepts designed a flexible seating riser and mezzanine system that can be arranged into eight different configurations. The equipment and components are portable and flexible enough for designers to create unique environments and one-of-a-kind audience experiences for every production. When the curtain rises on the 2021 season in January, this flexibility will enable the theater to host rehearsals, performances and audiences with optimal protection.

Staging Concepts also offers [portable stacking theater chairs](#) that can be attached or set up individually based on distancing needs. The upholstered seats are offered in both armless or armrest versions and are designed to increase personal space, allowing for more room at the hips and elbows. Their streamlined profile also optimizes spatial efficiency.

VIP Spaces for Fan Spacing

As professional and collegiate sports return with adapted seasons and spectator-less events, stadiums and arenas across the country are actively preparing for a time when they can welcome fans back into the stands. Already on the rise prior to the pandemic, [VIP sections](#) are playing a new role as templates for a new era of spectating. Designed to offer patrons more personal space, these sections are in high demand as venues look for ways to accommodate fans in comfort and safety.

Our team was integrally involved in the addition of a new [VIP Pavilion](#) at City Field, home to the New York Mets. Initially intended to offer a more spacious viewing option, this area is ideally suited for the anticipated distancing requirements driven by the pandemic. Staging Concepts engineered a seating system that includes 18 platforms with custom railing and aluminum enclosures and four sets of stair units. Offering plenty of room to accommodate larger groups, the new platform stage deck also features [drink rail](#) bolted to the concrete flooring and [glass rail](#) along the front of the pavilion to optimize views and spectator safety.

[Commonwealth Stadium](#) in Alberta, Canada, home to the CFL Edmonton team, also recently upped its in-venue game with an innovative [riser system](#) designed to create premium viewing options with added elbow room. Standard stadium seats in two main sections were removed and replaced with specialized [viewing decks](#) that increase the physical space for each individual spectator from approximately 4.5 square feet to an average of 242 square feet.

Looking Ahead

Without question, COVID-19 has led to a cultural shift that is requiring the live events industry to reimagine the entire public gathering experience for patrons. The many temporary, modular and customizable options available today can help as venues look to transition into a new era of spatial planning and design.

At Staging Concepts, we believe in more than just making good products; we strive to provide thoughtful solutions that elevate all people's abilities to safely access and enjoy amazing life experiences. That is our purpose, and the motivation that drives our employees to continually innovate and create new approaches for venues that host these types of experiences.

For more information, visit www.stagingconcepts.com.

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About the Author

Cindy Albrecht is Director of Sales & Marketing with Minneapolis-based Staging Concepts. Since 1990, Staging Concepts has provided the most advanced, modular, custom staging solutions for all types of venues, including performing arts, sports, worship, hospitality and special events facilities. To reach Cindy, email calbrecht@stagingconcepts.com or call 763.533.2094. For more information about Staging Concepts, visit www.stagingconcepts.com.