The University of Rochester is a private research university located in Rochester, New York. Featuring an alumni network of over 113,000 people, the annual Meliora Weekend is among the nation’s premier university celebrations. The four-day event combines reunions, family and alumni weekends, and homecoming activities in one all-encompassing celebration.

Supporting Meliora Weekend and other campus events is a key priority for the higher education institution. “Engaging the attendee is critical,” explains Donna Colline, Operations Program Director of the Office of Alumni Relations. “There is a lot of data that proves the point that the more people are engaged, the more they’re going to support the institution.” To successfully manage over 12,000 attendees across four campuses, the team works diligently to create a stellar attendee experience strengthened by event technology.

Mitigating In-House Inefficiencies

After leveraging an in-house registration platform for years, continued system maintenance was costly and inefficient. Anthony Giordano, Senior Director of Internet and Digital Technology, notes that the
registration experience was ineffective as a whole. “We did a lot of system updates that were manual, from registration to backend systems, reporting, and everything else,” he says. “It was expensive to maintain over time. Anytime you start to build things in-house, there are some costs with it. It just evolved past a point of relevancy.”

A paper-heavy packet and ticketing process meant the event did not support the university’s sustainability goals. More than 250 hours were spent stuffing packets, accounting for more than 18,000 pieces of paper. This resulted in inevitable errors, reprints, and extra costs. The team was forced to close registration a week ahead of the event to stuff packets, losing out on valuable revenue. Data reconciliation meant manually processing thousands of attendees within the CRM, which took more than 600 hours to complete.

Calculating the True Cost of Manual Processes

The amount of staff hours and resources required to manage registration and the onsite experience became untenable. Schedule modifications and refund requests were managed via email, requiring updates by staff in two separate systems. The process ate up more than 100 hours of staff time. In addition, nearly 2,500 paper registration forms for walk-ins had to be printed and modifications had to be entered into the system manually, wasting more than 200 staff hours and
Maximizing Event Technology Investment

Moving to Cvent’s Event Marketing and Management platform improved the registration experience and presented unexpected efficiencies. “One of the biggest advantages we saw in moving from our in-house system was cost savings,” says Anthony.

8,500 sheets of paper amounting to $12,000 in additional costs. Onsite attendance was manually calculated through visual headcounts across 200 different sessions.

Finding a technology partner with integrated solutions was key. Anthony explains, “Each aspect of this complex event requires special considerations, and no single vendor had been able to meet all our needs in the past.” The answer, he says, was Cvent.

“Just because you build something in-house doesn’t mean it’s free. Once you build it, it’s constant maintenance. So there was definitely a significant cost year-over-year of maintaining the old system.” Attendees could easily modify their own registrations and process refunds. This eliminated over 100 hours of staff time and allowed the team to manage 200 sessions across 75 locations with unique fee structures and target audiences.

The team also integrated their CRM with Cvent. This ensured all demographic data could be efficiently pulled for reporting purposes. Previous list management involved “going into our system to pull lists down to our segmentation filtering, then upload them into other different systems,” says Anthony. Now, data is instantly updated with automated reporting in place.

“We’re able to reallocate that money to do more with what we’re doing with Cvent. Where we would have had a set budget to do registration, we can now do registration and use the Onsite Solutions. It allowed us to expand what we were doing where we just couldn’t before.”

—Anthony Giordano, Senior Director of Internet and Digital Technology
“We have a daily feed where, whenever those custom fields update in our CRM, it pushes over to Cvent and is immediately available for us,” he adds. The integration allows various teams to be more efficient with email marketing and segmentation as well. “We were able to push over a lot of custom contact fields to allow us to do segmentation and reporting,” he adds. “The fact that the Meliora registration process is now integrated with our backend system has allowed us to be much more efficient with email marketing, invitations, and communication.”

In 2016, the team added CrowdCompass to their technology suite. Attendees could easily build schedules, receive push notifications, post to the integrated social feeds, and access needed resources. “We also leverage the interactive maps within the app heavily because we are on several campuses,” explains Anthony. Using CrowdCompass to house session content helped bypass the packet stuffing process, saving more than 250 hours and supporting campus sustainability goals. Donna explains, “We believe it has been about $30,000 to $32,000 saved in not having to staff manually stuffing packets. Far and above the paper, it was the printing costs. That was about $13,000 a year that we did not have to do any longer, as we did it all through OnArrival and CrowdCompass.” By going digital, the team is now able to do more with less and provide a high-tech experience while introducing new, environmentally-friendly best practices.

Creating an Ever-Better Onsite Experience

With the event’s namesake “Meliora” meaning “ever better,” the team sought to create an unmatched onsite experience. Walk-ins could be processed without reprinting badges, meaning registration could stay open a full week longer. This allowed for thousands of last-minute sign-ups and additional revenue streams. OnArrival allowed attendees to check-in and self-modify registration onsite. The badges contained QR codes that could be scanned for event entry, eliminating paper tickets and clickers for head counts. Real-time reports kept stakeholders updated on the latest metrics from every campus location.
“One of the biggest advantages we saw in moving from our in-house system was cost savings. Just because you build something in-house doesn’t mean it’s free. Once you build it, it’s constant maintenance. So there was definitely a significant cost savings year-over-year.”

—Anthony Giordano, Senior Director of Internet and Digital Technology

Focusing on the Future of Meliora Weekend

By integrating a single-point solution for their registration, onsite, and mobile needs, the university saved hundreds of staff hours and tens-of-thousands of dollars. Eliminating the in-house registration system allowed the department to reallocate over $100,000 towards improved technology solutions. “We’re able to reallocate that money to do more with what we’re doing with Cvent,” Anthony explains. “Where we would have had a set budget to do registration, we can now do registration and use the Onsite Solutions. It allowed us to expand what we were doing where we just couldn’t before.”

Bolstering their technology suite has enabled the team to position Meliora Weekend as a premier university event. Donna looks forward to the future of event technology at the University of Rochester. “We have a large institution that does a lot of events throughout the year, not only in advancement but across all of our campuses,” she says. “Utilizing Cvent to enhance this flagship event has encouraged us to evaluate our other 450 plus annual events to see if Cvent can alleviate additional fundamental challenges.”