As the industry adjusts to operating in a virtual environment, event professionals are finding exciting ways to drive virtual attendance and attendee engagement. While fully digital events are propelling unique innovations in technology, this new normal does require a shift in traditional event planning strategies. Amanda Bowman, Mobile Technology Advisor at a large Financial Services organization, helped her organization craft virtual engagement strategies for their premier events. As she notes, “Engagement needs to start before the event ever happens. Bringing in unique outside elements can add a lot of value, especially with a mobile event app as it can be a valuable source of connection for attendees.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mobile app adoption rate</th>
<th>Engagement points</th>
<th>Donations facilitated via app</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>99.3%</td>
<td>11,800</td>
<td>$197,000</td>
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Leading the Organization with Virtual Events

When the global health crisis first began, Amanda's team was in the midst of planning an annual leadership event. The three-day event typically rotates between America and EMEA, and this year's event was scheduled to take place in the U.S. with pre-weekend activities available during registration. In late February, news of the global pandemic led the team to shift the event to a virtual environment. In just one month, Amanda's team needed innovative solutions to drive engagement during pre-event activities, session content, keynotes, happy hours, and networking coffee chats.

Amanda's team relied on the integration between Cvent and the Cisco Webex virtual platform to support their virtual event. This integration ensured all data flowed seamlessly between the two platforms, creating a central repository within Cvent to ensure data integrity. Without the need for multiple attendee lists or registration processes, the organization could easily track attendee data within a single system of record. Attendees, on the other hand, were guaranteed a seamless user experience with one-click access from their registration confirmation email.

Rather than creating an entirely new registration site, the team adapted their existing website by closing in-person registration and creating a new virtual attendee pathway. Previously registered attendees were moved to a virtual registration, and invitation and confirmation email templates were quickly updated with new virtual details. To keep stakeholders informed, they updated custom reports with the virtual registration type and added new custom questions. Amanda's team also pivoted the event messaging to better suit the current climate, focusing on leading through challenging times. The agenda, session descriptions, speakers, and dates and times were all updated within the event in less than one week's time.

“One of the largest pieces of feedback we received from attendees was that this virtual event was the most intimate and engaging summit they had been to year-over-year.”

- Amanda Bowman, Mobile Technology Advisor
Using CrowdCompass for a Compelling Virtual Experience

To help facilitate participant engagement with both the content and other attendees, Amanda relied on the CrowdCompass mobile event app. As the high-touch event featured 136 senior leaders from five continents, networking and team building was key. “We had to navigate the challenges of creating that same level of connectivity among attendees as with our in-person event,” explains Amanda. To do so, the team used a bevy of features within the app. “The features and functionalities we used in CrowdCompass included the Dynamic Event Guide, activity feed, push notifications, sessions, speakers, and segmenting regional groups for virtual happy hours and coffee chats,” she adds.

Her team created a first touchpoint with attendees through a pre-event survey from Cvent’s Surveys tool. This allowed Amanda’s team to gather key information, like mailing addresses for pre-event packages filled with swag items. They also collected attendees’ favorite songs, photos from their experience working from home, and seven unique statements meant to be a pulse check for the presentations. The photos were featured in the pre-event activity feed to build buzz, and were later used as interstitials between sessions to keep engagement levels high.

By encouraging pre-event engagement via the mobile app, Amanda’s team saw an impressive 99.3% adoption rate. In comparison, the average adoption rate for all 2019 events at the organization was 71%. In fact, they saw over 3,000 pre-event attendee engagement points with more than 7,000 minutes spent in the app before the event began.

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Strategizing the Way Forward with Virtual and Hybrid Events

In planning a go-forward strategy for virtual and hybrid events, Amanda says it’s important to remember each event is unique. “One of the realities of going virtual is that it’s not a one size fits all solution,” she notes. “We need to make sure that we take the goals and needs of the event into consideration before looking at the technology features we need to employ.” She also believes that virtual will continue to be a key aspect of future events within the industry. Her organization is looking at executing

Driving Engagement for Social Good

The team followed each day with a unique survey and a post-event survey at the close of the event. These gave the department comprehensive insight into session learnings, content takeaways, and event technology feedback. To drive survey completion rates, the organization offered a $50 donation per finished survey to a COVID-19 related charity. In total, attendees submitted 222 surveys, resulting in more than $11,000 in donations made on their behalf.

During the event, the team helped manage attendees via several navigation icons and three unique engagement hubs. The hubs included “Food and Entertainment,” “Wellness,” and “Philanthropy” sections. The “Food and Entertainment” hub housed a Spotify playlist, curated from the attendees’ favorite songs from the pre-event survey. It also included a dedicated section with food, cocktail, and mocktail recipes. Attendees were encouraged to make the recipes at home during the virtual happy hours and post their results as photos to the activity feed. “They were a big hit with attendees, giving them the opportunity to do team building and have an engaging experience virtually,” adds Amanda.

The second hub featured wellness offerings, apps, and web platforms for exercise and relaxation. As an added benefit, it also included free subscriptions and trials for attendees. Together, these two hubs provided innovative digital networking and team building opportunities. They were a success with over 8,800 engagement points, 2,000 icon taps, and 17,000 minutes spent in the app.

The “Philanthropy” hub was dedicated to three unique purposes: driving donations through a centralized link, directing attendees to outside charities by region, and housing instructions for accessing the link on a personal device. The organization aimed to drive donations by offering a two-to-one match. Ultimately, 72% of attendees donated via the app. With the corporate match, they raised an incredible $197,000 in just three days.
both virtual and hybrid events in 2021, due in no small part to the expanded marketing reach they provide. “Since moving to virtual events, we have noticed an uptick in registrations. So, while we prefer joining live, we definitely want to give attendees the flexibility to have the virtual option in the future,” she adds.

As for the remainder of this year, Amanda notes that “virtual is our new reality for this time period.” The organization has no plans for an in-person event in 2020, meaning she and her team will continue to navigate the virtual world and how technology fits into their strategy. “The biggest advice I have for organizations that are looking to take their events virtual is that engagement needs to start before the day of the event,” she insists. “We also found bringing in outside elements that didn’t relate to the session content, like the Food and Entertainment hub, added a lot of value to the app and attendees found it to be a valuable source of connection.” With an attendee feedback score of 4.43 out of 5, her team has more than exceeded their goals for the virtual event. Moreover, she notes that they received overwhelmingly positive feedback from their attendees. “One of the largest pieces of feedback we received from attendees was that this virtual event was the most intimate and engaging summit they had been to year-over-year,” she says.

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