How The University of Greenwich used technology to deliver engaging open days

4,333 Registrants

83% Email Open Rate

38,925 Interactions Completed
Like many other higher education institutions, the March 2020 national lockdown could hardly have come at a worse time for the University’s student recruitment cycle.

“Following the first lockdown we had to move quickly as we were in the middle of a vital part of the student recruitment process, the conversion of offer holders to confirmed applicants,” explains Nicola Rowe, Events Manager at the University. “We didn’t have time to engage a virtual event platform holder for the events planned for our March and April offer holders, so instead had to deliver over 120 individual webinars. We quickly found that a virtual platform was needed.”

Finding the right virtual platform

After the challenging initial transition to a fully virtual event strategy, the team planned ahead to their June 2020 open day. They needed to replicate several key features of the physical event they were replacing:

- Direct meetings between candidates and academic departments
- Public talks and presentations
- Open departmental booths
- Enabling candidates to access and take away pertinent information

“Cvent wasn’t the first virtual event platform provider we used”, says Nicola. “We initially implemented a different platform, popular with other universities, and were able to implement booths, live chat and pre-recorded on-demand talks for the 2020 open day.

“We arrived at Cvent via a competitive supplier procurement process,” recalls Sarndeepl. “We were initially drawn in by their long-standing reputation and track record, and anticipated they were better placed to service our needs, and more importantly those of our customers. The ability to hold live talks and collaboration sessions was critical, as we wanted a site that could adapt to the ever-changing world. We also shared common vision: Cvent was already talking about hybrid events when we also saw them as the way forward, while others still focused on exclusively virtual offerings.”

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— Sarndeepl Kaur Raven, UK Student Recruitment Manager
Creating a virtual open day with Cvent

“We had just six weeks after signing the contract to deliver the event,” shares Nicola. “Fortunately the support and training received was absolutely fantastic, Cvent was fantastic at talking us through how to set up the event. The backend of the site was also very easy to use, which was key as multiple staff members were involved with it.”

The team hosted the event within Cvent Attendee Hub®, Cvent’s event management platform. To attend the event, candidates log in to the platform, where they can build a schedule, browse sessions, access content on demand, and more.

“We set up exhibitor booths for every department and had collaborative meetings in each to replicate the 1-to-1s between staff and students, an essential part of the open day experience,” Nicola continues. “There were around 25 exhibitor areas in total, each full of documents, videos and other uploaded content.” The team make use of Cvent’s Speaker Resource Center to add and manage speakers. The tool allows speakers to upload and confirm their own information and content.

“We scheduled talks both live and on demand, and uploaded speaker profiles to keep candidates informed. We kept things relatively simple due to the timeframe and logistics of training over 100 staff to use the platform, using Zoom for the meetings as staff were so familiar. Ultimately we drew similar attendee numbers to 2020’s virtual open day but received much better feedback, validating our decision to switch providers.”

Reaching international markets sustainably with hybrid events

As the majority of lockdown restrictions lifted in London, the prospect of a return to physical events was in the air.

“We’re really excited to be delivering in-person events again,” Sarnddeep shares. “However there are many aspects of the virtual format we don’t want to lose, and a hybrid model lets us retain them. We’ve found that, virtually, we’ve been much more able to engage with the international market. One of our goals as an organisation is to become carbon neutral by 2030, and Attendee Hub helps us achieve this by doing away with printed materials. Inclusivity is also one of our core values, underpinning everything we do as an organisation. If someone can’t attend on the day, or needs to leave early, or needs more time to process information, virtual allows them to still receive the benefits of the event.”

Later in 2021, the University hosted their first hybrid open day. While they welcomed visitors to the campus in-person, candidates could also
join virtually, and in-person attendees could also access the Attendee Hub app before and during the event, to aid check-in, plan their schedule and access more detailed information.

“We feel it was the right decision to switch to hybrid,” recalls Nicola. “The ability to host physical and virtual attendees made the event much more accessible, and the app enabled people to review the content beforehand in much more detail than they could before. It was definitely a success and we’ll be looking to include more hybrid elements, such as live streaming, in future.”

The University made use of Cvent’s online survey software to collect feedback and compare across events, collecting data on reasons for attending, ease-of-use regarding the technological aspects, subject interest and more. After the hybrid event, one attendee shared the following:

“I loved the fact that pretty much everything was accessible online from the self check-in to planning your schedule via the app. I do think it aided the smooth running of the day and I enjoyed the experience overall.”

“We definitely believe that hybrid is the future of events, and would encourage anyone who feels nervous to take that next step” concludes Sarndeep. Despite the initial frenzy of virtual adoption, the Greenwich team has seen a range of benefits from their implementation of virtual and hybrid event formats, and plans to continue working with them well into the future.
Cvent is the global meeting, event, travel, and hospitality technology leader.

Cvent provides easy-to-use, integrated technology solutions to maximise the impact of meetings and events of all sizes. We help organisations plan and market events, execute onsite, engage audiences, and measure and analyse results.

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