

17 Promoting & leveraging meeting content



Tight budgets and growing competition are prompting associations to squeeze extra value out of their conferences. Web-based libraries of digitised abstracts and recorded sessions are dramatic value enhancers for members. But they yield many other benefits too.

The evolving event: changing the success metrics

An important first step in developing a plan to leverage meeting content is for the entire organisation's team to achieve buy-in on the premise that the conference content has value beyond the actual event. Once this occurs, it allows the creation of a plan to efficiently cultivate a tradition that will benefit both the live and virtual audiences. Traditionally when a presenter is selected for a particular presentation, the audience size is limited to the size of the meeting room. Now, that presentation can be delivered to a significantly broader audience. Presentation "impressions" can be expanded beyond the four walls of the meeting room to include non-attending members as well as potential members who find value in the conference content. As a result, it is possible to significantly multiply the presentation "impressions". With the use of reporting tools and analytics, the organisation can aggregate all the viewing statistics (both live and virtual) and determine the entire participation of the conference content rather than just the live attendance of the conference.

Creating a content lifecycle is not a new idea

Many organisations do not offer an alternative way to participate and learn from the event. In most cases their message is "you either attend our conference in our chosen city, at our chosen time, or you get nothing." Other industries deliver their content via alternative means. Why not association meetings? A great example is how Hollywood recognises the value of its content. The studios leverage the value of their movies by delivering their content through a very established life cycle that initially delivers via a theatrical release (in a cinema), which requires its audience to go to a specific venue to watch the content at a predetermined time. Hollywood then takes that content and delivers it through a number of other channels such as online services (iTunes/Netflix), pay-per-view, DVDs, premium cable, basic cable and then eventually network television. Cinema revenues only account for about 25% of the total revenues of a typical movie!

Members' expectations with content

Today's professionals expect to access meeting content anywhere, anytime, via any device. If meeting sessions are streamed live or available soon after a session, it can help them get more out of their busy conference schedules.

Online access is also invaluable to those who cannot attend a particular conference because of schedule conflicts. Member recruitment and retention both benefit when a conference lifespan extends beyond the event itself. While nothing replaces the face-to-face networking value of attending a conference or symposium, combining an on-demand library of meeting content with a well-developed social media outreach programme sparks member conversations and interactions. These can continue long after the conference is over, turning up the volume for the association as a whole. Event sponsors likewise may be happy to pay for a presence in this virtual market space.

E-learning statistics show growth!

In past years, association executives expressed concerns about cannibalising meeting attendance if meeting content is made available online. Quite the opposite has occurred, according to implementers. Early adopters have discovered that live audiences have remained steady. These associations have also built new audiences that are often willing to pay for online access.

Many position their online meeting libraries as part of their e-learning programmes. Upwards of 75% of associations now offer some sort of e-learning programmes through their websites. These programmes provide professional development opportunities for members, who often have exclusive or lower-priced access to them than non-members. About a third of associations charge for all of their e-learning offerings, while about half charge for some.

Best practices and getting started

Association executives are finding that the initial investment to create an online library increases overall returns to the organisation through:

- new memberships
- better retention of existing members
- creation of new revenue streams through virtual proceedings and extended sponsorships
- extending the reach of the brand.

Groups eager to begin often don't know where to start. We generally advise them to begin with one or two pieces of the total solution, such as recording the conference sessions or digitising abstracts and posters. This is an easy way to increase audience and leverage content far beyond the meeting itself.

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