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How to cancel or postpone a congress with grace?

In recent weeks it has become a bit quiet around our congresses and events, because COVID-19 had a firm grip on not only us, but also on the entire event industry. We were faced with the challenge to decide whether to postpone or cancel events within a short period of time and without much prior notice. Our temporary state of shock did not last very long, and we quickly started to look for alternatives for ourselves, our participants, industry sponsors and service providers. The question how to proceed and whether we can even let the congresses take place has been of great concern to us in recent months and this is how we dealt with it:

MOVE

The congress is rescheduled from a previously set date to a new date.



What needs to be considered?

We pay attention to the rules and regulations issued by government and health authorities. Each event must be analysed individually in terms of potential public safety and health factors. Events need to be postponed if public safety and health factors cannot be eliminated.



Our promise to our participants

We offer a discount for the postponed congress to our participants. Registrations remain valid for the new congress date. Participants are not required to register again.



Our relationship with sponsors and service providers

Sponsors and service providers should be notified immediately. Previously negotiated contracts should remain valid for the new congress date. Some service providers might insist on compensation or contingency payment to offset financial losses. It is recommended to have a look at the sponsorship packages and negotiate which items shall be repeated for free or at an additional cost to the sponsor.



External communication

Update the website regularly with updated conditions and ensure the information is well publicised. We make intensive preparations for the new program and communicate it to the registered participants. A question and answer section, FAQ or chat bot might be useful to help answer the participants requests quickly.



What's next?

The current situation forces us to reschedule. To ensure security for the participants and the team, it is imperative to keep an eye on the current effects of COVID-19. The course of the event should be checked and adjusted regularly. These precautions should be explained.

CANCEL

The congress is cancelled without giving an alternative date.



How to decide whether to cancel?

All current public safety and health regulations must be considered. It needs to be clarified how many participants are expected. Organisers have to contemplate whether the congress can take place considering the potential public safety and health risk. Necessary measures need to be implemented.



Dealing with participants

It is important to inform participants and give explanations by e-mail in a clear and reassuring manner. The participants are entitled to a refund off the ticket price as soon as possible.



Dealing with sponsors and service providers

Sponsors and service providers should be notified immediately. Previously negotiated contracts have to be cancelled. Some service providers might insist on compensation or contingency payment to offset financial losses. Sponsors and other industry partners are entitled to receive a refund. Services that have already been provided should be deducted from the refund. It is also possible to negotiate that the costs are split between sponsor and organiser. Each negotiation should be a fair deal for both sides.



Comprehensive communication

In order to avoid misunderstandings, clear and direct messages should be issued, both to contract providers and participants. Information about future steps should be published in due time. At the same time, advertising and ticket sales on the website and on social media should be removed.



What can we expect now?

Virtual events are currently experiencing an enormous boom. Those who want to reach their participants and convey their messages due to a cancelled event are now entering the virtual world. Participants should be made aware of other virtual events through newsletters and social media advertising.

One Thing is

We will all very much appreciate being able to go to events in person again, shaking hands with other people and exchanging experiences with a drink after lectures.

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