American Association for Laboratory Animal Science Case Study

When the Contingency Plan Becomes the Main Event

THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR LABORATORY ANIMAL SCIENCE STORY

HOW ASSOCIATIONS CAN ADAPT TO THE TIMES WITH RESEARCH AND THE RIGHT TECHNOLOGY

Chris Lyons's association faced a daunting task: Planning two annual meetings at once. Maybe this sounds familiar: Lyons, who is the associate executive director at the American Association for Laboratory Animal Science (AALAS), was contractually obligated to a host city for an on-site meeting. But as the pandemic descended across the US, he realized he needed to simultaneously plan for a virtual event.

Like many associations dealing with a volatile year, "the uncertainty of planning two potential meeting formats divided our focus," he said. Eventually, the AALAS's commitment to its on-site meeting was lifted, and Lyons and his team were able to focus all their efforts on planning a virtual event—with just a few months to spare.

The Covid-19 pandemic had many organizations struggling with how to navigate major event commitments. Executives and their staff grappled with how to rapidly transform their annual meetings by successfully leveraging digital platforms and trying to replicate the benefits of an in-person experience.

It was a reactive, stressful year, by most accounts. But going forward, Lyons and his team learned from the chaos, and they're planning to use their experience to fuel growth and efficiencies moving forward.

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> The A2Z team is always great to work with. They gave us all the tools we needed, explained everything really well and gave us much-needed confidence in the exhibits component of our first virtual event, even with a very short timeframe.
>
> — Chris Lyons, American Association for Laboratory Animal Science

THE CHALLENGE

WHAT DOESN'T THRILL YOU MAKES YOU STRONGER

While 2020 may have been trial by fire for many organizations, one silver lining is that many of those same organizations discovered inner strengths – like resilience and the ability to pivot their planning, especially through digital technology. This turned last year's challenges into a springboard to inform event planning for the future and helped AALAS identify different ways to keep attendees engaged in a variety of meeting platforms.

For example, Lyons tapped into Personify's technology suite to reduce reporting bottlenecks by making data more accessible to his entire team instead of relying on traditional methods of pulling data. This improved processes and allowed for more efficient and effective decision-making.

THE SOLUTION

MAY I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION, PLEASE? IT DEPENDS

Audience engagement starts with tuning in, but without true interactivity, it's far too easy to tune out in favor of another browser tab, incoming IMs, or other real-life distractions now that so many are working from home.

In exploring ways to keep participants' attention, Lyons mentioned live polling, video chat breakout rooms, push notifications, live question-and-answer sessions, quizzes, virtual activity-a-thons, and virtual photo booths as examples of some of the strategies they are considering for future events.

MAKE SURE YOUR TOOLS ADAPT WITH THE TIMES

Embracing new technology often comes from identifying what's not working and making changes accordingly. One challenge Lyons' association faced before adopting ThreeSixty many years ago was that their original database didn't have capabilities for ecommerce integration. That's what catalyzed their search for a new system in the first place. But as part of the upgrade to a more comprehensive management system, ThreeSixty has also given their association the ability to centralize their data, such as online exhibitor registrations, with other databases for memberships and subscriptions.

It's important for associations to identify what their needs are when it comes to their virtual presence and strategies and then match those needs to the right tools. Ultimately, those digital tools should help reinforce the reason people attend conferences in the first place: for the meaningful connections, networking opportunities, and professional development they look forward to all year. In other words, help them remember why they're a member in the first place.

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About Personify ThreeSixty:

Personify's ThreeSixty Association Management System (AMS) is the market's most robust and flexible solution for enterprise associations and nonprofits looking for a technology infrastructure that supports their unique processes and complex workflows. Organizations can drive revenue growth and operational precision by leveraging a powerful foundation that can be customized to meet their needs today and in the future with a modern and extendable, browser-based interface.

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