

Successful Tech Strategies

Linda E. Schwartz



Does your conference website entice visitors and pull them in, or is it basically an electronic brochure?

Come Into My Website, Said the Association to the Visitor

The past decade truly witnessed a revolution in the way attendees register for conferences. In the “old days” members mailed hard copies of registration forms. Then came the next great tool — the fax machine — prompting exclamations of, “Wow! I can just put my hard copy on this machine and voilà! It goes to the registration department within seconds!” Now, it is very common for most conference registrations to be made online, and some organizations have stopped printing and mailing conference brochures altogether.

Whether you use a mix of print and online or online only, your conference website is crucial to the ultimate success of your meeting. Internet-savvy consumers approach each website with a very critical eye and often make the decision to stay on the site or leave within mere seconds. Does your conference website entice visitors and pull them in, or is it basically an electronic brochure?

See how three different organizations enhanced their annual meeting websites, resulting in increased registrations and revenue this year.

Dscoop (Digital Solutions Cooperative). Tina Chang, marketing manager, worked on Dscoop’s conference microsite for its February 2011 Annual Conference in Orlando. The site was created in WordPress, which provided an interactive function for session and partner company descriptions. On both pages, visitors could click on a session or company name and expand it to read more. This

facilitated the ability to see a large amount of information with minimum scrolling required. The site also incorporated a Twitter feed to display the conversations started by the Dscoop handle, @myscoop, along with a countdown timer for the event.

Google Analytics measurements were used to compare the effectiveness of this year’s site to last year’s.

Dscoop Website Analytics	2010	2011
Number of visits	16,500	22,000
Number of page views	54,000	66,500
Number of registered attendees	1,800	2,400

For the 2012 meeting, Chang is investigating a site that renders well on a mobile phone, along with enhanced functionality that would allow attendees to create their own schedules online.

FICP (Financial & Insurance Conference Planners). Nicole Nelles, marketing senior coordinator, helped plan FICP’s first-ever conference microsite for the organization’s June 2011 Education Forum in San Diego. After having hosted all event information on the registration company’s website for several years, this year FICP chose to create a microsite hosted and managed internally by the marketing staff. The event theme was central to the site; FICP was able to use member photos and other information and to make changes to the site quickly, rather than submitting requests

to the registration company. This structure allowed the team to proactively make additions and alter the marketing messages based on the type of member inquiries and comments appearing in FICP’s social media areas. The site was so well-received that Nelles and the marketing team already are working to create a similar site for FICP’s event this fall.

Cosmetologists Chicago (America’s Beauty Show). Tim Hendrickson, senior content coordinator, launched a new conference website for America’s Beauty Show (ABS), held in Chicago in March 2011. Hosted by Cosmetologists Chicago (CC), membership consists of creative salon professionals who respond positively to less text and cleaner visual content. To make the site more visually appealing, Hendrickson incorporated a large flash piece on the home page and cut the overall site content by approximately 50 percent. The new site highlighted information that was more practical and tool-based, such as registration, and featured simplified navigation. CC is a group that participates heavily in social media, so the social media icons and content were positioned prominently, resulting in a large and ongoing spike in Facebook “likes” and Twitter followers.

The site improvements helped to drive record attendance at this year’s show, along with the largest-ever number of online registrants. An added bonus was greater exhibitor partici-

pation in digital and email advertising, further enhancing ABS’ revenue.

Hendrickson is already thinking about the 2012 site, which he plans to make more of a destination in and of itself by offering unique content and additional user tools for members.

Everyone has a favorite — and a least favorite — website. Aside from the products and/or services being offered, favorite websites tend to be easy to navigate and always have something new or interesting to see. The worst thing your conference website can be is static: If it looks the same 90, 60 and 30 days before your event, it’s time for a change! Even a few tweaks like changing the content on the site’s home page, featuring different speakers, adding new photos and links to speaker videos or podcasts, and adding details about the location, can help keep a site fresh. Plus, search engines give preference to sites that are updated more frequently.

Remember, your conference is the second destination for members and other attendees; your meeting website is the first. If the first destination isn’t enticing, chances are your online visitors won’t get to the second.

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