

Volcano Stops Keynoter but Spurs Innovation

Apr 26, 2010 2:46 PM, By Dave Kovaleski

Meeting professionals for COE, an organization for users of Dassault Systems PLM solutions products, were glued to the news of the Icelandic volcano that began erupting on April 14. The COE Annual PLM Conference and Technifair was set to open on Sunday, April 18, in Las Vegas. But with ash from the Eyjafjallajokull volcano continuing to spread through European airspace, it was clear that flights would be canceled through the weekend, preventing 50 attendees and a keynote speaker from getting to Las Vegas in time for the show.

But what looked like an obstacle for COE and its management company, SmithBucklin, in the end proved to be a proof-of-concept event for how the COE audience would respond to integrating virtual elements into the live conference experience. When COE planners put their heads together, the answer to the keynote problem quickly became clear: go virtual. SmithBucklin already planned to deliver a live stream of some sessions to a virtual audience and record others for the archives, explains Ellen Moore, senior vice president of education and certification services at SmithBucklin. Now the team had to figure out a way to do the opposite—stream a virtual presentation to a live audience of about 800.

“When we realized that people weren’t going to be traveling out of Europe, we started talking to [keynoter John Unsworth, CAD strategy manager, Bentley Motors Ltd.] about using our webinar technology to try to deliver the session to the attendees that way,” explains Moore. Unsworth, who had the video, audio, and multimedia equipment to conduct a virtual presentation from his home office in the U.K., was on board with the idea.

When COE planners arrived on site in Las Vegas the day before the conference, they started rehearsing for the keynote. “Unsworth was briefed on the concept Sunday afternoon his time and graciously offered to test and rehearse well into his evening, then presented flawlessly the next morning our time,” said Bret Kelsey, COE’s executive director.

Using just a laptop, they were able to stream his presentation live over the Internet, projecting his videos and slides on a big screen in the conference hall at the Rio All Suite Hotel and Casino. Lydia Goessel, education and program manager for COE, managed his session on site, cueing up his discussion points, videos, and slides at the appropriate times. Unsworth’s voice, coming through the computer’s voice-over-IP (Internet Protocol) function, was piped through the hotel’s loudspeaker system.

Unsworth couldn’t hear or see what was going on in the hall, nor could attendees communicate with him directly. However, using real-time text messaging, Goessel reported what was happening in the room.

◆ The presentation went very well and was well received, ◆ says Moore. ◆ There were lots of positive comments. ◆

COE was able to offer the registration spots of the grounded Dassault employees in Europe to U.S. colleagues at Dassault Systems Americas. As a result, the organization is not expecting to take much of a revenue hit.

◆ The positive feedback for the virtual experience seemed to become a proof point for both attendees and association leaders that this type of presentation is in fact a viable option for a large audience, ◆ said Kelsey.

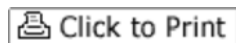
Related Articles

[Eruption Disruption: Meetings Scramble After Flight Cancellations](#)

[Commentary: Is Eyjafjallajokull Just an Opening Act?](#)

Find this article at:

http://www.meetingsnet.com/associationmeetings/news/volcano_coe_conference_0426/index.html



[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.