Application: 1401

Page: Achievement Award

Category

Innovative Programming Effort

Chapter

Wisconsin

Chapter Size

Mid-Sized (301-850 members)

Entry Title

Two Annual Conferences in One-Fiscal Year! And One Was a Hybrid! We Are Mid-size but Mighty!

Entry Description

Producing an Annual Conference for 400 members is no small task, certainly for a mid-size chapter. Producing two in one fiscal year is herculean – particularly when the first one is a hybrid!

Due to COVID and contractual obligations with our venue, The 2021-2022 Programming Year handed us not one but two Annual Conferences to produce! Not only did we pull it off, but we knocked them both out of the park! With record attendance, sponsor participation and a record number of new members!

Our Annual Conference and Meeting of Members is scheduled for May each year. This is the corner stone of our programming year, providing two-days of in-person programming for close to 400 attendees each year at a location in central Wisconsin. In 2021 we were forced, once again, to pivot due to COVID and moved the conference to November. With our members and sponsors needs and safety always at the forefront, we decided to produce a hybrid event. Producing a 2-day, three-track event - with tracks that run simultaneously being LiveStreamed to our conference app, was the equivalent of producing, three, 7-hour television shows at once. Fortunately, our Executive Director has a background in virtual event production and three of our Board members agreed to be trained as Virtual Producers working with our AV and App Teams. Attendees and presenters could attend virtually or in-person or both, as everything was accessible on our conference app. We provided 23 different CLE sessions, including Ethics, and approved CLE in 10 different states.

In 2022 we were back to our regular schedule of a May conference and in-person only. This time the challenge was attracting attendees when we had just had a conference 6-months earlier. Through close work with our sponsors to design unique, timely programming, adding new social events and extending a 1-year membership deal (thank you for the discount National!) to non-members, working various non-member lists as contacting past presenters, we were able to meet and exceed our registration goals, we added 35 new members and even brought in two new sponsors!

The success of pulling off two conference in one fiscal year cannot be understated. We are a mid-size chapter with only an Executive Director, no staff and limited budgets. The success of these back-to-back conferences speaks volumes about our innovative programming, our deep technology acumen, strong membership base, and a hardworking, Executive Director and hands-on, committed, hardworking Board of Directors.

When was the program initiated?

11/4/2021

What was the project objective?

The objective was to produce two, high-quality, cost effective, Annual Conferences available to our members both in-person and virtually and to do it in such way that was easily accessible to our members and sponsors. To harness our technological skills and resources to insure that attendees obtained the high-quality CLE they needed, to make sure our sponsors were able to timely present topics and share their expertise with our members, and to stay engaged with our membership during a time when not everyone was able to meet in person all the while keeping costs in line with our budget.

How was the objective achieved?

The objective was achieved through creative thinking, hard work, great sponsors, presenters, and vendors and LOTS OF COFFEE. We were able to put on two, 2-day live and virtual Annual Conferences where everyone had access to presentations. This was possible by having an Executive Director and Technology Chair that have depth of knowledge in virtual production, apps and strong technology acumen. Combined with great relationships with our conference vendors, it made for an easily accessible and safe conference for all of our participants. We have been using the EventMobi App for the last 6 years, so our attendees were very comfortable with the platform and although the learning curve for our production team was a bit daunting at times, the end user experience was seamless. Our conference surveys highlighted how much they enjoyed being able to have the option to attend in-person or virtually in 2021 and access each program on our conference app. In 2022, both our members and sponsors were enthusiastic about getting in front of our members again in-person with content that was much needed and a sense of normalcy we could all use. We kept the safely of everyone involved at the forefront and did require vaccines to attend. We also had all venue safeguards in place. This had no negative impact on the events, in-fact, it was very much appreciated, and our registrations were higher than expected. We delivered a high-quality experience for all attendees.

Our conference surveys praised the organization for great content, excellent hybrid execution, and engaging speakers. They appreciated the creative networking events - Bingo, Trivia, Raffles (including court side seats to the World Champion Bucks) Yoga, Sprits/Wine Tasting and Golf. For many of our members, our Hybrid Conference was their first virtual conference experience. In 2022, our Conference was for many their first in-person event. To quote an evaluation: "I was thrilled to attend this year's conference, I knew it would be great and that all safety precautions would be in place. The ACC always has my best interest at heart, which is why I will continue to be a member". We not only achieved our goals we surpassed them!

What was the project budget?

$142,000.

What obstacles were faced while doing this project/program?

There were many obstacles to face and overcome in order to produce two, high-quality conferences in one fiscal year:

Venue: Renegotiating our venue and vendor contracts to not only move dates but not incur additional costs or penalties. Insisting on the highest standards of COVID safety for our guests.

COVID: Providing a safe environment for our attendees that could join us in person. The messaging of our COVID Vaccine requirement to all attendees. We received very little negative response to our requirement. In fact, it help increase our attendance.

Technology: As stated earlier, producing a 2-day, three-track event - with tracks that run simultaneously being Livestreamed to our conference app, was the equivalent of producing, three- 7-hour television shows at once. This took an extreme amount of ingenuity and know how from our Executive Director. Our Hybrid wasn't a series of Zoom log ins - it was a state of the art Hybrid Conference that allowed our attendees a "One-stop" experience - they accessed our entire conference without ever having to leave our app platform. This was no easy task, it required linking and programming three separate platforms, living streaming 26 different feeds over the course of 1.5 days simultaneously. We had three session rooms running for 7 hours each, with only 10 minute breaks in between each session. Each session room required zoom webinar links, speaker feeds, cameras and audio feeds. Exec. Director has virtual event production experience. The AV team's experience in hybrid events was limited and our EC spent countless hours training not only the AV team but three volunteer Board Member to be Virtual Producers.

Budget: We had a very tight budget but we were able to work closely with our vendors in 2021 to keep costs down. This proved more difficult in 2022 however, with sky rocketing service and food costs. Fortunately, with the increased revenue from Hybrid attendance in 2021, we were able to off set some of the increases that we were hit with in 2022.

Attendance in 2022: In-person and virtual attendance in 2021 were exceptional but hitting our attendance goal for 2022 was going to be more challenging. We leveraged our BOD's networks, past speaker and attendee lists as well as negotiated the use of the State Bar of WI list free of charge (Normally $4,000). With the help of ACC National, we were able to extend a 1-year membership registration deal that gleaned over 20 new members. Created new, creative networking and wellness events and brought in Nagin Cox, the Woman behind the Mars Rover as our Keynote speaker. Happy to say we exceeded our attendance goals.

In 300 words or less, please state how this project was innovative.

These programs were innovated in our cost-effective use of technology to deliver a seamless, powerful and effective 2021 Hybrid Conference (a first for our chapter) connecting over 325 attendees and speakers both in-person and across the globe (we had 4 international sessions). We managed to put on our hybrid events with technology and human resources that we already had, Zoom, EventMobi, Venue AV Team, Executive Director and Board Members. We did not incur any additional costs related to conducting a hybrid conference. In fact, we made money in 2021. Our technology innovations continued into 2022 with our continued use of our Conference App's capabilities and the streaming of two-international hybrid sessions. We used innovated marketing strategies to hit our attendance and sponsorship goals and based on attendee feedback, far surpassed our member, sponsor and speakers expectations.

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