

WHY COMPANIES ARE HARNESSING THE POWER OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AT PHARMA EVENTS

INTRODUCTION

Use of digital technology at meetings and events is transforming the attendee experience from passive to engaged. Meeting Planners International (MPI) reports that 63% of meeting professionals use digital technology and event apps to organize and run events, providing more convenience and better event outcomes. The healthcare industry, however, has been more hesitant on the uptake of digitization due to industry regulations and compliance.

This report looks at:

- Why companies are using technology at meetings
- Challenges faced by the pharmaceutical industry regarding meeting and event planning
- How to overcome potential stumbling blocks to using digital tools at pharma events.

DATA DISCOVERY

For many years meeting planners have been working to attract and grow attendance at events which has led to a focus on event innovation and maximization of attendee experience. From pre-event to on-site to post-event, technology is changing and improving the live event experience. **So why are many industries moving to digital technology?**

The short answer is that the attendee experience defines the success of an event. And how do you know if the event was successful? Now you can capture, analyze and interpret the data using event tech to create better meeting and event experiences.

One of the primary reasons industries are moving to digital event tech is that success and impact can be demonstrated by the numbers. Data generated by an event app allows organizers the ability to capture and identify the most influential delegates and discover what is working or not working at meetings.

Feedback is a rich source of information to understand the level of audience understanding and engagement. With this information in hand post-event, planners gain insight to prepare for the next meeting and can make data driven decisions to continually improve outcomes – ultimately creating value for money. Then there’s the ability to demonstrate ROI!

TRANSFORM ATTENDEES FROM PASSIVE TO ENGAGED

In addition, attendees are expecting more from meetings: more engagement and more interaction. Meeting participants are eager for opportunities to contribute to and shape the events themselves. This makes delegates take ownership and feel part of the event.

Additionally, attendees are looking for opportunities to network and make lasting connections with KOLs. In a study completed by Ashfield Meetings and Events, 74% of healthcare attendees indicated meetings should have increased interaction between the delegates and the KOLs. Attendees appreciate having their voices heard at events through event tech, such as live polling, interactive patient case studies, and word clouds. And by increasing audience engagement, the overall level of event enjoyment is elevated.

Plus, real time digital tools help planners understand how a speaker is connecting with audiences as honest feedback can be gathered. Speakers and planners gain insight on what the audience is thinking during events and can adjust content, if necessary. However, there is a difficult balance to achieve in delivering a quality, engaging event within the confines of pharma industry compliance.

CHALLENGES FACED BY PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANIES

According to a survey completed by the Event Manager Blog in 2018, 85% of event planners use event technology software. Overall, the use of event apps grew by 68.2% from 2018 to 2019. However, pharma companies have been slower on the adoption rate, most likely due to the highly regulatory nature of this industry. Only 52% of pharmaceutical companies have used a mobile app or device for an event.



Of the challenges faced by pharma, complying to the codes of conduct and ensuring security of data are paramount. In the UK, ABPI Code of Practice 2008 focuses on governing meetings and hospitality between pharmaceutical companies and healthcare professionals. Additional regulations such as the EFPIA apply to companies across Europe while the IFPMA applies worldwide. Companies must comply with the applicable codes and associations to ensure that events, promotions, and hospitality are not used inappropriately to influence the behaviors of healthcare professionals.

Presentation content must be approved by outside authorities such as Veeva (formerly called Zinc). Thus, partnering with a company that understands these systems and can adjust timelines to accommodate approvals is necessary.

Security standards also shape the nature of pharmaceutical meetings to ensure there is no data breach. To maintain competitive edge, a pharmaceutical manufacturer's trial data must remain secure as well as licensing and drug approvals. Who has access to the presentations at events? Are slides only accessible during the presentations? Numerous questions must be addressed to ensure data is locked down.

PROVIDING SOLUTIONS

How can pharmaceutical companies innovate at events to create a total customer experience while securing data and keeping within regulatory guidelines?

While a number of event apps exist to choose from, finding a partner that offers a consultative approach will deliver the best outcomes. Meeting planners need to secure a seamless partner in events, particularly one that specializes in pharmaceutical and healthcare meetings. Planners need a consultative expert, one who understands the complexities and nuances of the industry, understands and listens to pharma needs, and knows the critical role that conferences play in communicating new healthcare developments. Meeting planners need to partner with an events management team that understands the procedures for content approval, allowing timelines to accommodate pre-approval, and the sensitive data security requirements.

Second, regarding data security, planners should work with a technology company that is compliant with GDPR and other data privacy protection regulations (e.g. California Consumer Privacy Act, Japan's Act on Protection of Personal Information). Planners should know the answers to key data security questions. What happens to data post event? Within how many days must data collected be wiped from data management systems?

In addition, making sure that a closed, secure WIFI network is set up at the venue is critical for data security, particularly when sensitive medical data is being communicated. WIFI networks should have restricted access via password protections. And some confidential presentations may require watermarking. Strict data privacy legislation is popping up in more and more economies which will lead to global organizations having to adopt a cross-regulatory compliance strategy.

CONCLUSION

So, why are companies harnessing the power of digital tech at meetings? Key reasons include:

- improving the audience experience via engagement
- gaining real time event feedback
- capturing and interpreting data for ROI and continuous improvement.

When contemplating the use of event apps for pharma events, the relationship between the planner and the app provider must be one that is consultative, providing solutions across the whole customer journey – because it's not really about the app. It's really about the partner that is chosen to help manage the delegate experience and streamline the nuances that are particular to the healthcare client. The bottom line is that it is possible to deliver an innovative event while keeping data secure and within compliance.



"In my role working with Pharma clients, I focus on helping to create and deliver exceptional experiences. This means listening, understanding, guiding and supporting you, not just as a consultant but as a partner vested in your success."

Jo Merriman specializes in pharmaceutical and healthcare events. Her passion for bringing innovation to events starts with understanding the client's objectives and is evident in how she supports clients throughout the journey from pre-event to post-event.

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