



Association for Vascular Access: Strategic Change Leads to Attendance and Sponsorship Growth



While the event industry did not expect to completely reimagine itself in 2020, for some events, this year's twist has led to positive outcomes.

Transitioning to virtual opened up the opportunity to strategically change events' formats in order to deliver compelling content in innovative ways and attract new audiences. When the Association for Vascular Access (AVA) took its Annual Scientific Meeting virtual, that's exactly what happened. With the help of planning partners Conference Managers and Sponsorship Boost, it changed the show strategy to build an engaging experience for attendees and sponsors that also drew new participants to the event.



AVA Annual Scientific Meeting 2020

AVA's Annual Scientific Meeting is designed for healthcare providers that touch patients with vascular access devices – doctors, nurses, radiologic technologists, respiratory therapists, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, students, and caregivers of patients with long-term devices. Many of them have been on the front lines of the COVID-19 fight. The meeting focuses on education so that attendees can learn about new devices and technology to improve patient safety. Technology is constantly changing, innovative research and data are more accessible than ever before, and clinicians are expected to stay on top of it all.

In 2020, attendees were given access to four days of live and on-demand continuing education sessions, as well as opportunities to tour the virtual exhibit hall and video chat with exhibitors. Dynamic Q&A opportunities after each session gave attendees the ability to get the information they needed as they headed

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into 2021. Sponsors and exhibitors attracted leads through virtual booths and sponsored educational content.

Challenge

AVA Annual Scientific Meeting is typically an in-person event that attracts 1,100 healthcare professionals. When AVA switched to virtual, it focused on making the event engaging as possible for attendees. To do that, it had to reimagine the schedule to prevent overwhelming its audience with long days of content, and simultaneously meet its exhibitors' and sponsors' needs. AVA also needed to ensure that its large sponsors and exhibitors could obtain the same leads and outreach that they would normally get while in-person. And finally, AVA needed to create compelling sponsorship packages that would allow them AVA to retain the payments and deposits sponsors and exhibitors had already made.

AVA relied on Conference Managers and Sponsorship Boost to guide them through the process of reformatting the event and developing new sponsorship opportunities.

Strategy

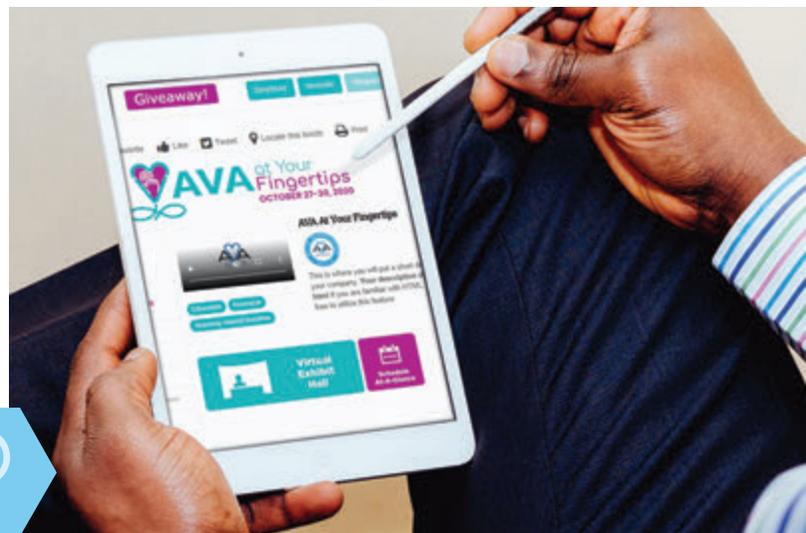
Conference Managers' and Sponsorship Boost's collaborative strategy built a virtual event that delivered on AVA's key concerns.

Uncovering the Optimal Show Format

Conference Managers developed several iterations of the event schedule to help AVA determine the optimal format. Many factors affected each iteration including:

- Cost of the livestream channels
- Production crew costs to run concurrent sessions on multiple days
- Availability and willingness of the presenters to do virtual presentations
- Evolving best practices for virtual events
- Maximizing exhibitor exclusive hours
- Fitting sponsored content into the schedule

Ultimately, the virtual event was held for four days from 11am-5pm each day. It started on a Tuesday to allow one business day before



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kicking off the virtual event. The Tuesday start had the added benefit of allowing organizers to take a final run through, make last-minute tweaks, and get attendees to log in early on Monday to avoid being inundated with login questions Tuesday morning.

Each day consisted of approximately three hours of continuing education content and one to two hours of exhibitor content. Three of the days also included an hour of exclusive exhibit hall time which attendees could video chat with exhibitors.

Rather than presenting all of the content live, AVA offered about 20 sessions purely on demand that were accessible for 60 days post-event. Eliminating sessions from the live four-day schedule allowed AVA to offer more content without making the days too long.

Focusing on Engagement

Once the schedule was in place, AVA leadership incorporated several features to increase audience engagement. First, a live Master of Ceremonies—AVA's Director of Clinical Education—recapped each day and gave commentary on what the audience learned. She also moderated live Q&A with the general session speakers. Second, live polling of the audience kept them engaged as well. Finally, the team utilized video by setting up virtual roundtables, which were sponsored by exhibitors, and video chat hours with exhibitors.



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Flawless Execution

Like in-person, most virtual attendees never see the scope of preshow logistics work, but on event day expect everything to come together in one seamless experience. In addition to supporting the virtual event strategy, Conference Managers executed key components of the event. It hired the production team, integrated registrations with the platform, re-booked attendees and re-launched registration, managed the entire platform launch, and launched the mobile app and CE software. It managed the speakers' virtual green rooms, the Q&A, and attendee platform support.



Building Innovative Sponsored Educational Content

Sponsorship Boost maintains close relationships with AVA's sponsors and exhibitors so it began by setting up calls to assure them that the platform and conference would still provide the data they wanted. The informal conversations provided insight into developing sponsorship opportunities that companies were looking for and how to price them.

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To retain sponsor and exhibitor commitments, Sponsorship Boost developed four packages, pricing the smallest one at the same price as a standard 10 x 10 booth. The earlier conversations revealed that sponsors wanted the opportunity to get their message out to attendees, so a key offering was sponsored educational content. These were modeled in different formats, from short TED-style talks to longer symposiums, and priced accordingly. AVA's AV company recorded the symposiums, which kept those large education segments in-line with AVA's brand and attendee experience.

Results

The strategic changes lead to positive results for AVA. At the end of the 2020 Annual Scientific Meeting, AVA had 1,250 clinical attendees (149% of registration budget). It kept the platform open for about 8 weeks after the event and allowed for new registrations. AVA also achieved an increase in sponsorship revenue, coming in at 232% of the sponsorship budget. The sponsored educational content opportunities aligned well with the event's purpose and enhanced both attendee and sponsor experiences.

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“This was the first year AVA had a virtual event and we couldn’t have done it without Conference Managers’ and Sponsorship Boost’s step-by-step guidance. It allowed us to make decisions based on factors that were important to our organization such as attendee experience, exhibitor and sponsorship opportunities, and overall budget implication,” said Tonya Hutchison, Chief Operations Officer at AVA. “During these unprecedented times it was imperative that our association pivot in multiple areas and it gave us comfort to know that we had an excellent team working with us through the new virtual events world.”

With strong support, reimagining an event for the virtual world—even unexpectedly—can be an opportunity to make changes that can attract new audiences to the event. When in-person events return, virtual components can make a hybrid experience that delivers value to attendees who can travel and those who cannot. Conference Managers and Sponsorship Boost provide the guidance and strategic expertise organizers need to drive positive results.

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703-964-1240 | www.conferencemanagers.com

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301-200-4616 | www.sponsorshipboost.com

Conference Managers and Sponsorship Boost can help event organizers deliver meaningful experiences and create innovative solutions for each event’s unique situation. They also position events for success in the future as the concept of meetings shifts to hybrid models.

