

Impact of COVID-19 on ... Medical Conferences and Live Events

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

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Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic is a powerful trigger that will change human behaviors and accelerate adoption of new methods of scientific information-sharing among medical professionals, powered by technology and virtual forms of collaboration.

It is now vital to achieve the goals once met by live events in new ways, both as a response to the present pandemic and in the longer-term future.

Replacing live events with virtual digital experiences makes it possible to continue to deliver the benefits of face-to-face meetings, and perhaps even extend their reach and impact.



Situation

In addition to publications, the medical community (healthcare professionals, scientists, and pharmaceutical manufacturers alike) has relied heavily on conferences, congresses, symposiums, and other live meetings to share new scientific information and engage with each other. (Personal, face-to-face connections are the foundation of human society, and interacting with others is how we learn and build relationships.) Live events have long been a foundational part of scientific advancements in the field of medicine: for the dissemination of information; for interaction among

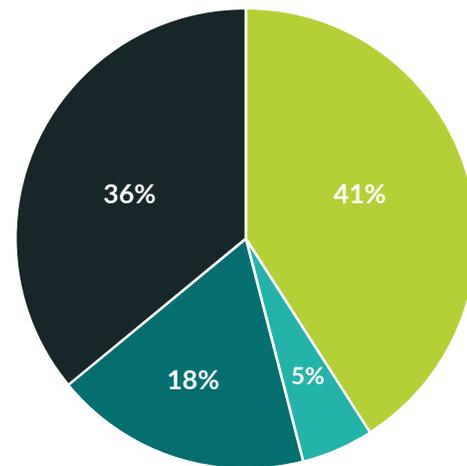
community healthcare professionals (HCPs) and key opinion leaders; and for companies in the pharmaceutical industry to demonstrate their commitment, showcase their product pipeline, and stay top of mind.

Challenge

Now is the time to create short-term and long-term strategies to share information and enable connections that are less reliant on point-in-time, in-person gatherings.

MEDICAL CONFERENCES RESPOND TO COVID-19

A representative sampling of major upcoming medical meetings as of the writing of this POV



CANCELED

- ACOG
- ENDO
- DDW

MOVED ONLINE

- ACC
- APA
- ASCO

POSTPONED

- AACR
- Bio-IT
- BIOMEDevice Boston

CURRENTLY PROCEEDING AS SCHEDULED

- Immuno-Oncology Summit (8/10-14)
- OMTEC 2020 (6/9-11)

Improvise, Adapt, and Overcome

To mitigate the loss of live-meeting experiences, brand strategies should be based on an understanding of the intrinsic motivations and core behaviors of attendees of those events.

HCPs seek the latest information related to their specialties, as well as broader updates in medicine, technology, and innovation, as demonstrated by surveys and the high volume of foot traffic that poster presentations receive. HCPs and pharma attendees also seek opportunities to network, build relationships, and forge future partnerships. Conferences and events traditionally required brands to spend time and money to entice attendees to interact and engage in a very limited amount of time during the event. However, the real ROI has always been in creating memorable and impactful moments. These may have happened during an event's official programming – but they may also have taken place before, after, or outside it.

Successfully transforming live events into virtual ones is possible by leveraging technologies that are already widely available.



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COVID-19 will change the world as we know it. I had my first virtual ad board this week. Every conference is being canceled, and it's only a matter of time before they become virtual meetings. Once the infrastructure is in place, I think all but the biggest conferences will be virtual.

- ONCOLOGY KOL

Assessing the purpose of the event, and the goals and behaviors of attendees; training the participants on the technology and the new approaches to engagement in a virtual environment; and communicating to all attendees consistently and fully will ensure that virtual meetings will continue to meet your goals.

Marketers should consider the best technology options for live and on-demand experiences, which can occur in secure, regulatory-approved settings. These could include:

- **Multichannel campaigns** to create awareness and excitement and to facilitate networking, including paid social media, private social media networks, print and direct mail, CRM, and MSL and rep communications.
- **Webinars** for scientific exchange, peer-to-peer programming, or moderated roundtables with live Q&As.
- **Interactive content** to allow HCPs to engage with data, such as visualizations that allow viewers to interact with and manipulate datasets.
- **Forums and chats** to facilitate discussions.
- **Interactive kits** that can be shipped to high-profile HCPs to engage with information and each other. These can include virtual reality (VR) tools such as Oculus Rooms and Rumi, in which attendees use headsets to interact with each other and with dynamic content (such as posters or MOA animations). Virtual worlds can be designed to look like auditoriums or multiple-level convention centers.





Like their in-person predecessors, virtual events can be designed to connect and engage like-minded individuals to discuss, educate, collaborate, and share. Tools like those mentioned above – even the most complex among them – are already in place and are being utilized effectively. **For example, in February 2020, the completely virtual “Educators in VR Summit” included 100 hours of content, 150 speakers, and about 6,000 attendees over six days. And at Intouch, we have quickly pivoted client workshops to remote experiences with more than 40 attendees, using technologies that enable a highly collaborative, best-in-class experience.**

VIRTUAL CONFERENCE IS POSSIBLE



Caveat - this was a bunch of VR geeks. But, I was incredibly impressed with our ability to meet, learn and build community with seemingly no loss of parity to the real world.

**- BRENDON THOMAS,
DIRECTOR OF INNOVATION**



The American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) has announced that its June 2020 meeting would be held in a virtual format.

As of the time of this POV, currently available information suggests that scientific updates and data sessions will proceed in the virtual format, whereas general education sessions and booths will not. For an ASCO-specific POV, oncology brands can contact Intouch Group.



Summary

A trending outcome of COVID-19 is that most 2020 conferences will adapt by moving to virtual settings. To continue disseminating scientific information and facilitating HCP engagement, marketers must revisit their core goals for conferences. Delivery will be eased by new technologies (emerging daily), and by widespread behavioral change.

As we manage the immediate impact, it's important to keep an eye on longer-term changes that may significantly alter our future. Large conferences were on the brink of transformation prior to the pandemic. We predict that this particular platform will experience a permanent impact. Now is the time to test and try new solutions to prepare for a virtual-conference revolution in 2020 and beyond.

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