

# Convention Tactics in a Post-COVID-19 Environment

**T**he beginning of 2020 presented some extremely unique circumstances for everyone. It didn't take long to realize life was going to change on a personal and professional level. As the quarantine started, and the medical congresses for the rest of 2020 were being canceled, agencies knew their marketing strategies had to adapt fast. Clients were moving allocated budgets from physical conferences to virtual tactics and initiatives. Marketers had to quickly start brainstorming and prototyping solutions for the current lockdown, thinking ahead to when physical meetings would resume and how the future would be different. Would attendance numbers be as robust as in the past? Would attendees be comfortable interacting with touchscreens? What would be the alternative to packed medical sessions?

## Meeting the Challenges of the Times

Here are a few solutions to the challenges medical conferences face in a post-COVID-19 environment.

**Pre-congress.** Most pre-congress tactics won't change too drastically in a post-COVID-19 world, with drivers to booths or virtual spaces still including emails and social media posts. Instead of relying on handing out physical invites for sessions, marketers can try using augmented reality (AR) posters at the congress venue. There are quite a few effective AR over-the-web opportunities now available that will allow attendees to use their own mobile devices to activate and immerse themselves in a targeted experience.

**Touchless Panel Navigation.** Touchscreen applications have typically been the bread and butter for information dissemination at conference booths. A booth representative could be hired to disinfect the screen between sessions, but let's consider some alternatives. The leap motion hand tracker is a perfect solution for this challenge. Attendees can use simple hand gestures to navigate apps. Quick "how-to" programs can be launched at the start of the session, so the attendees can familiarize themselves with the simple gestures needed to dive in. Non-touch tactics are effective and have worked well for busy attendees.

Another option is to give users complete control from their own mobile device. Offer them the opportunity to walk up to a screen and scan a QR code. Attendees' phones then automatically sync to the booth's WIFI, allowing users to see an interface on their phone and take control of the app. The only device users need to touch is their own phone.

**Proximity Sensors.** Another great option for touchless control are proximity sensors. As attendees walk by, a screen can have messaging encouraging them to come a bit closer. As they approach the screen, the content can change. Animations can be controlled depending on how far or close users are from the screen.

**VR Headset Alternatives.** Virtual reality (VR) experiences are amazing for showing mechanism of action or disease details. The challenge in the post-COVID-19 world will be getting attendees comfortable with wearing the headsets. A domed immersive screen is a great alternative to sharing (and having to disinfect) individual headsets. A limited number of attendees can enter a dome with multiple projectors to provide a 360-degree experience for all. And don't forget to offer those attendees the opportunity to control the content themselves on their mobile devices.

**AR Booth Experience Over Web.** AR experiences have been commonplace in booths for quite some time now. Previously, most relied on apps on shared devices provided within the booth, but now new technologies allow for AR to be enjoyed solely through the web. This allows attendees to use their own devices to view an AR experience, including menu items and drivers to web forms for opt-ins. These can be triggered by posters or objects within the booth. This also provides opportunities to extend the impact of the AR experiences by sharing them at home with mailed, printed items that can come to life after the conference.

**Social Challenges.** Who doesn't love a good competition or game at a conference? Why not sponsor a congress-wide social challenge? For example, a steps challenge — you can then push users' daily info onto leaderboards via an app or an in-booth display, which would encourage attendees to make return trips to the booth.



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## Virtual Congresses and Virtual Booths.

We are currently going through a transitional period where it makes more sense to have a virtual presence rather than a physical one. While some congresses will have their own virtual platforms, a light and agile web presence can work wonders for getting messages to the target audience. Micro-sites using a content management system can be developed quickly and adapt to push news out. Take a 3D rendering of the booth and make interactive tours with a deep dive into the content. Leverage virtual peer-to-peer platforms to replace in-person medial meetings, including moderators, virtual Q&A sessions, and live polling.

**Virtual Poster Sessions.** Poster sessions can be substituted online with the opportunity to dive deeper into data. Digital interactive posters can be controlled with the attendee's own device.

**Post-Congress.** Post-congress communication is key for return on investment. Standard email and social tactics will remain the same, but physical follow up with healthcare professionals will need to adapt. Consider setting up Veeva Engage or Zoom meetings to continue the conversation.

The post-COVID-19 future is uncertain; marketers need to rise to the challenge. While this is uncharted territory, these will prove to be exciting times full of new opportunities for healthcare marketing. <sup>PV</sup>

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