

American Association for Laboratory Animal Science Case Study

When the Contingency Plan Becomes the Main Event



How Associations Can Adapt to the Times With Research and the Right Technology

Chris Lyons's association faced a daunting task: Planning two annual meetings at once. Maybe this sounds familiar: Lyons, who is the associate executive director at the American Association for Laboratory Animal Science (AALAS), was contractually obligated to a host city for an on-site meeting. But as the pandemic descended across the US, he realized he needed to simultaneously plan for a virtual event.

Like many associations dealing with a volatile 2020, "the uncertainty of planning two potential meeting formats divided our focus," he said. Eventually, the AALAS's commitment to its on-site meeting was lifted, and Lyons and his team were able to focus all their efforts on planning a virtual event—with just a few months to spare.

The whiplash of 2020 is a common story for organizations navigating major event commitments. Executives and their staff grappled with how to rapidly transform their annual meetings by successfully leveraging digital platforms and trying to replicate the benefits of an in-person experience.

It was a reactive, stressful year, by most accounts. But going forward, Lyons and his team has learned from the chaos of 2020, and they're planning to use their experience to fuel growth and efficiencies in 2021.



The A2Z team is always great to work with. They gave us all the tools we needed, explained everything really well and gave us much-needed confidence in the exhibits component of our first virtual event, even with a very short timeframe.

CHRIS LYONS

*American Association for Laboratory
Animal Science*

What Doesn't Thrill You Makes You Stronger

While 2020 may have been trial by fire for many organizations, one silver lining is that many of those same organizations discovered inner strengths – like resilience and the ability to pivot their planning, especially through digital technology. This turned last year's challenges into a springboard to inform event planning for 2021 and beyond. In this spirit, Lyons said the AALAS will continue to identify different ways to keep attendees engaged during virtual meetings—the venue of choice for at least a while longer.

For example, Lyons tapped into Personify's technology suite to reduce reporting bottlenecks by making data more accessible to his entire team instead of relying on traditional methods of pulling data. This improved processes and allowed for more efficient and effective decision-making.

May I Have Your Attention, Please? It Depends

Audience engagement starts with tuning in, but without true interactivity, it's far too easy to tune out in favor of another browser tab, incoming IMs, or other real-life distractions now that so many are working from home.

In exploring ways to keep participants' attention, Lyons mentioned live polling, video chat breakout rooms, push notifications, live question-and-answer sessions, quizzes, virtual activity-a-thons, and virtual photo booths as examples of some of the strategies they are considering for future events.

Make Sure Your Tools Adapt with the Times

Embracing new technology often comes from identifying what's not working and making changes accordingly. One challenge Lyons' association faced before adopting Personify360 many years ago was that their original database didn't have capabilities for ecommerce integration. That's what catalyzed their search for a new system in the first place. But as part of the upgrade to a more comprehensive management system, Personify360 has also given their association the ability to centralize their data, such as online exhibitor registrations, with other databases for memberships and subscriptions.

It's important for associations to identify what their needs are when it comes to their virtual presence and strategies and then match those needs to the right tools. Ultimately, those digital tools should help reinforce the reason people attend conferences in the first place: for the meaningful connections, networking opportunities, and professional development they look forward to all year. In other words, help them remember why they're a member in the first place.

About Personify360 for Associations

Personify's suite of products enables organizations to meet their goals, even during challenging times. Associations trust our solutions to:

- **Hook New Members:** Powerful CRM and eBusiness tools to streamline operations and focus on what's important.
- **Boost Your Presence:** Engage members, delight exhibitors and grow your brand with virtual and in-person event tools.
- **Grow Revenue:** Automate renewals and amplify opportunities for non-dues income.
- **Make Data-Driven Decisions:** Understand member behavior with actionable insights.



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