IDC Survey Finds the Shift to Virtual Events a Modest Success with Room for Improvement

FRAMINGHAM, Mass., July 7, 2020 – A recent International Data Corporation (IDC) survey confirms that conferencing applications were already in wide use at home and at work prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. When the pandemic created the need to move in-person events to virtual meetings and conferences, these "connected consumers" brought along some expectations. To a large degree, they were looking to replicate their "in person" experiences in the virtual world.

Some of the most common activities when attending an event in person are engaging in conversation, socializing, and networking with other attendees as well as exchanging business cards. Attendees at virtual events want to pursue similar activities by posting to social media, interacting with other social media handles, and exchanging LinkedIn addresses. In fact, IDC found that nearly half of all attendees at virtual events engage using social media, compared to just 16% at in-person events. But few event organizers actively facilitated this kind of attendee interaction with less than half of the events offering live chat to ask questions of speakers or for audience interaction.

"Live events are an important source of information for attendees and this is a function that organizers can handle very well with live streaming and content downloads," said Wayne Kurtzman, research director, Social and Collaboration at IDC. "But an equally important reason to attend these events in person is the opportunity to meet and network with other people. Organizers still have some work to do here to deliver an experience that will be equally beneficial to a remote and distanced audience."

The sudden shift to virtual events in the first half of 2020 produced mixed results in terms of attendance. While just over half of the events lost audience in the transition, 46%
gained attendees as a result. Removing travel requirements and audience familiarity with video presentations worked together to keep event attendance largely intact.

Overall, about half of the attendees at these virtual events were neutral on their experience, more or less getting what they expected. But nearly a third indicated that they had a better experience than expected with some stating they had a better experience than an in-person event.

From an event organizer's perspective, the virtual events were largely seen as a success. The metric used by most organizers to measure success was attendance, but downloads, revenue, and audience engagement also scored well. In general, tech companies were more successful with audience engagement while companies with branded communities saw higher session attendance and greater social media hashtag usage. Overall, nearly half found the virtual event to be less expensive to produce than an in-person event.

When asked what could have been done better, event organizers and attendees both identified engagements during the event as one of the top areas for improvement along with audio quality (organizers) and the need
for closed captions (attendees) on the technical side. Both groups also identified networking events as something warranting further attention.

"Looking ahead, virtual events are people’s new 'real world' events," added Kurtzman. "To succeed, make sure attendees have easy ways to engage with each other, the organizers, and speakers. Use platforms that were meant for the purpose and prepare the platform, your social team, and support teams. Finally, make the impression a good one with video, lighting, and audio – and usable, authentic content."

To learn more about what worked well and what did not, please see Wayne Kurtzman’s new blog at https://bit.ly/38u2Vdh.

The IDC report, Virtual Meetings and Conference Survey (IDC #US46604420), examines the preferences, experiences, attitudes, and behaviors of organizers and attendees of in-person events that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, became virtual events. The research identifies expectations of virtual meeting attendees and organizers, as well as best practices by organizers, and shares recommendations derived from the research.

About IDC
International Data Corporation (IDC) is the premier global provider of market intelligence, advisory services, and events for the information technology, telecommunications, and consumer technology markets. With more than 1,100 analysts worldwide, IDC offers global, regional, and local expertise on technology and industry opportunities and trends in over 110 countries. IDC’s analysis and insight helps IT professionals, business executives, and the investment community to make fact-based technology decisions and to achieve their key business objectives. Founded in 1964, IDC is a wholly-owned subsidiary of International Data Group (IDG), the world’s leading tech media, data and marketing services company. To learn more about IDC, please visit www.idc.com. Follow IDC on Twitter at @IDC and LinkedIn. Subscribe to the IDC Blog for industry news and insights: http://bit.ly/IDCBlog_Subscribe.

IDC is a subsidiary of IDG, the world’s leading technology media, research, and events company. Additional information can be found at www.idc.com. All product and company names may be trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective holders.
For more information contact:
Wayne Kurtzman
wkurtzman@idc.com
603-686-8107
Michael Shirer
press@idc.com
508-935-4200