Event Technology:
The route to improve attendee registration

by **eventscase**

Introduction

Anyone that's worked in the events industry should appreciate the use of a calm, efficient process for registering attendees. That's why so many organisers have turned to advanced technology as a way of accepting, contacting and satisfying the visitors that pass through their venues.

Unfortunately, not everyone has received the message. Email and paper-based methods of organising information are commonplace in an industry which is being pressured into doing more with less.

In recognising a need for greater efficiency around key tasks, EventsCase has compiled a guide which outlines how the current lineup of purpose-built technology is changing the registration phase for good. Read on to discover the role of advanced solutions in managing attendees and connecting many of the processes that are integral to running a great, profitable event.

Technology in events: the backstory

Technological innovation has impacted a long and growing list of industries in the last decade.

New devices and concepts have helped businesses to increase their productivity and achieve goals that were previously unreachable. Among technology's biggest beneficiaries is the events industry: a space where its leaders not only utilise, but rely on a suite of advanced tools to navigate their unrelenting schedules.

For an overview of how technology has impacted the way events are run, look no further than the use of email and registration software for gathering, managing and storing crucial information on attendees. Later down the line, a different feature within the same technology can be used to automate responses to attendees in a process that is much faster and easier than its manual equivalent. Those hours that were swallowed up in the mailbox can now go towards a more worthy cause, like planning the next conference or exhibition.

Small events have benefited heavily from some of the advantages that features like automation have offered. Yet, technology has been a genuine saviour for organising entities with hundreds of gatherings every year. The unconverted should remember that automating a single process has revolutionised entire industries through an overall saving of time and resource.

Adding to the case for technology, when looking into the additional uses of an event management platform in supporting mobile apps, badges, promotional codes and reminders for attendees, it's easy to see how organisers can gain a worthwhile return from their investment.

In this resource, we'll be delving into the inner workings of a typical event and assessing technology's impact on the running of one of its most crucial stages: the registration process.

We'll be going into the advantages of using an event management platform for inviting and engaging attendees, adding a few event planning tips for good measure, while providing an idea of just how much can be achieved with a technological edge.

Assessing the role of technology within events

It is true that there is a better way to organise and manage events, and we do not think it is on paper.

Any event organiser should recognise the considerable amount of time it takes to get something ready to host. When tallying up the man hours that are packed into the schedules of those with an event every month, week or day, it can get a bit overwhelming.

Even the best corporate event organisers have succumbed to considerable pressure as a result of deadlines and the size of their workforce. Despite only having a limited number of staff, they're required to dart between shareholder meetings, product launches, press conferences, and everything in between.

According to a survey from CareerCast, "event co-ordinator" is the fifth most stressful job in existence, trumped only by the routine of pilots, fire fighters, military personnel and police officers, which almost says it all.

Sometimes the frequency of their events is at a low level and might seem easier to manage, but their size and complexity is usually greater, thus creating the same issues attached to a busy schedule.

Will this situation ever improve? Well, in taking note of C&IT's State of the Industry report from last year, here was the forecast for 2017:
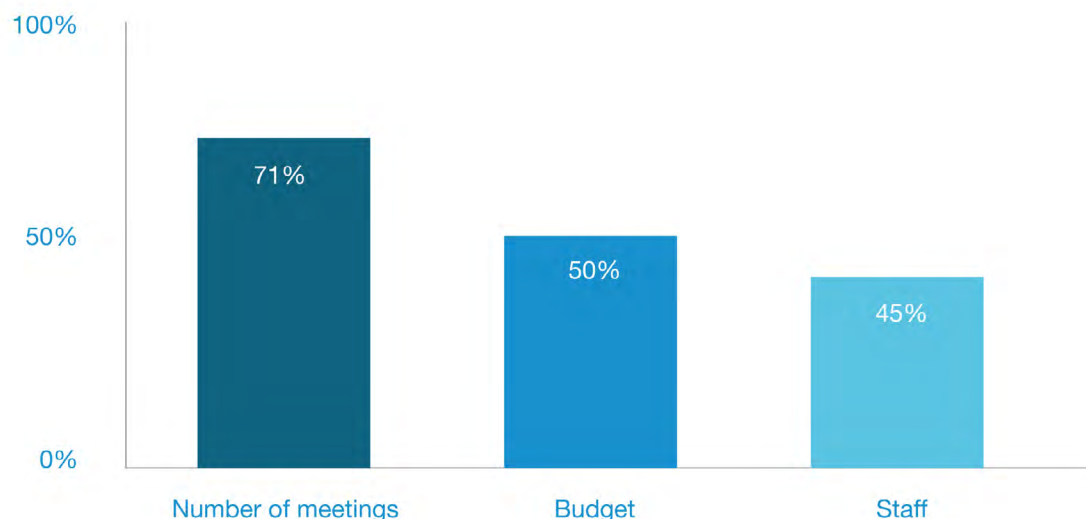
- 71% of event planners expect to organise more gatherings compared to 2016
- 50% of organisers will keep the same budget during 2017
- Only 45% of organisers will grow their team

In the above we can see a planned increase in the number of events being hosted but with no extra budget or staff, leaving the existing members to deal with an imbalance between workforce and workload.

The situation is calling out for something that makes it possible for an event manager to work more productively. For that reason, we should be thankful that technology is enabling these professionals to save weeks and even months in the managing of their hectic calendars.

There are now features that allow any event organiser to increase attendances, encourage engagement from attendees and add layers to the overall experience they receive. However, it's safe to say the heart of technology's management of an event is in the registration.

The events industry is full of horror stories regarding the mismanagement of attendees; incidents that can have a negative and lasting impact on the reputation of those involved.
Here are seven ways that technology can improve the running of this crucial stage:

1. Effective management of visitors

Email has revolutionised the way event professionals can send invites to attendees. Yet, there is still a big reliance on manual methods of checking statuses and issuing reminders. With technology, if the attendee has not received the original email, an organiser can view their current status in seconds and resend it.

2. Increase user information

Attendees will often come to an event with different requirements for food, transport or accommodation among other things. Technology is currently being used to capture and store this data for when it is needed.

3. Facilitate direct communication

Event organisers and attendees are constantly sharing data between each other. The individual planning the event has the opportunity to send personalised emails to every visitor; thanking them for their attendance, reminding them to finish their registration and even requesting feedback. Technology can power each of these exchanges.

4. Improve the organiser's brand image

Event managers shouldn't forget that attendees are real people; individuals who hail taxis via Uber, order food through services like Deliveroo and spend a rising amount on their mobile devices. It's not that attendees necessarily expect an event to be managed via technology, but their opinion of an organiser can certainly be enhanced with the use of powerful solutions to keep everything in check.

5. Reduce management time

Registration software is able to fulfill the same requirements as a paper-based system but on an improved and more efficient level. For example, a solution can be used to copy all attendee information, without duplicates or errors, for reference at the event. There's even time and money to be saved in distributing passes, as each user can print the confirmation that comes with their email.

6. Provide accountability

Registration for an event must be conducted without error, regardless of whether it is done through a mobile phone, tablet or computer. This is regarded as the safest way of managing information and ensures that every interaction can be traced back to the organiser.

7. Improve presentation

If the objective is to get more people to an event, it's important to use a striking, creative design to entice the recipient of the invite. Technology allows this to be customised to suit the organiser and match their unique branding.

Event management technology: A Stage-By-Stage Play

Any saving of time and improvements to efficiency can feed directly into a better result for the attendee. With that, event management technology seeks to offer more opportunities to the organiser and generate higher levels of income and satisfaction.

To assess just how much impact these solutions can have on your own registration process, it's important to split things up into three key stages for pre, during and post-event, all of which require very different uses of the technology.

Pre-event

Before things can start, the attendee is able to browse a website or an app to gather a quick overview of the event. The management technology is often integrated with these gateways to access certain information and ensure that each piece of data is collected and stored.
From here, the organiser will be able to see if the user has opened or accepted their invite before presenting them with a personalised form to log any unique requirements.

There's even a plan for converting some of the users that don't purchase tickets at this stage. In the event of an attendee visiting the inner depths of a registration page and failing to check out, the tool can identify them and use this to serve advertising based around the conference to push them over the line.

Then we have the special touches that help things run smoothly. As someone's verdict of an event is a representation of their overall experience, rather than what happened on the day itself, organisers have taken to applying additional measures to welcome attendees before they've put a foot through the door. By utilising a log-in system that identifies who they are, it is possible to give an attendee access to private areas, enabling them to redeem VIP tickets and anything else that fits their profile.

Some attendees prefer to have a way of viewing their data in case they want to make an adjustment to it. This is another duty of care which demonstrates the lengths that an organiser is willing to go in order to satisfy the end user.

A final consideration for every visitor pre-event is the building of their personal agenda. By using an app to access information regarding presentations, timings and guests, they can start to book places at sessions and request meetings with fellow attendees.

During event

While an event is taking place, it's common for an organiser to funnel information regarding presentations, timings and sponsors into a dedicated app. Of course, some attendees may prefer a physical programme, but a large portion will appreciate a digital one-stop-shop for getting what they need.

That app is then used to store information from its users and, through an end-to-end solution with links to the registration and check-in process, alert the organiser to key happenings. For example, when a VIP arrives and checks in, a team member can be alerted via push notification in case they want to welcome them personally.

The use of an app can also help the organiser to establish a direct line of communication with their guests. They might want to push the message of a sponsor during the event, or alert visitors to a change in the schedule; it can all be done in the same place.

On top of this, we cannot forget the accountability that technological solutions offer in what can be a testing environment. If ever the organiser should need to contact one of over 5,000 attendees heading to a big conference, they can do it via the platform.

Post-event

At the end of the event, organisers can use their platform to send feedback surveys with a view to understanding the opinion from the floor. This can be done through a separate provider - away from the event app - although requesting a user to navigate a second platform can hamper the response rate. In any case, given that most event managers will be too busy to gain an appreciation of what was good and bad, the importance of feedback should not be understated.

As aforementioned, it's easier to use technology for the automated sending of "thank you" messages, but these can also provide an avenue for communicating additional information, like the date of the next gathering or the launch of a similar event. It's features like these which really drive the needle for upselling and revenue.

The real-world cases

Technology represents an investment of two things. Aside from the obvious financial outlay, you also have the investment of time it takes for the workforce to get accustomed to a new way of running things.

Both of these will likely pay off in the long run. In the meantime, it's important to look at how technology can impact the registration process in a very familiar environment. We'll start with one of the most common events: the mass corporate gathering.

Technology for mass corporate events

Overview

Before things can start, the attendee is able to browse a website or an app to gather a quick Most big companies will plan, market and run their own events. These can be difficult to manage as, in the case of a conference that might last a few days, the audience may differ according to things like their tier of ticket. This requires some level of organisation to ensure optimum levels of success.

A few simple measures that technology can implement include:

Provide ⎯⎯⎯● Provide access to areas that are hosting presentations through a simple check-in within a mobile app or QR code at the point of entry.

Centralise ⎯⎯⎯● Centralise information like speaker bios and timings via a mobile app.
- Allow attendees to build personal agendas and meeting schedules via app (or have staff do this for them), to be collected as a hard copy at the venue or obtained online.
- Offer simple view of reg forms, badge types etc, whose management can be a headache for organisers and a common place for errors.

Supply ⎯⎯⎯● Supply option for attendees to select tickets that match their requirements.

Let's look at the role of event management technology in granular detail to see how it fares against the more traditional, email-driven equivalent.

The process through an event management platform

Things start with the prospective attendee being encouraged to head to a website to register their details. This is made simple by requiring the organiser to enter the questions they want to present to each person.

An email will be sent to the attendee if the organiser can see that the process has not been finished, complete with the amount of time left to register. Not only is this easier to perform through a dedicated platform, but these messages are not susceptible to viruses in the same way that basic emails are. One tactic is to send the email from a recognised source (e.g. registration@mygreatevent.com) for positive brand recall and to avoid being relegated to the spam box. Once the process has been completed, a "thank you" message is sent to reassure the attendee that a booking is made and they are to be expected on the day.

Once the attendee arrives, they can scan a QR code within a mobile app to redeem a pass or enter the venue. This alleviates some of the strain on team members, who would otherwise consult with a printed list of attendees to identify those permitted to enter.

Even the larger events will present some customisable options to their attendees, like the type of pass and the access it provides. As the event management platform is able to capture all of the necessary information, the organiser can establish any unique requirements before someone enters the venue.

Once the event has finished, an automated "thank you" email will appear when the registration has been confirmed and accepted, potentially with details of the next event to encourage early sign-ups.

The process through email

It is still possible to run a good event by registering users by email. However, there are some common issues which are making a great case for a more advanced solution.

Venturing down the email route may cause concern if you, as the organiser, do not receive a response from an attendee or if it went to your spam box. Furthermore, without receiving automated confirmation that they are booked into attending an event, there can be some frustration for the customer at the other end.

The registration desk is a place where tranquility and organisation is welcomed with open arms. Should a printed list fail to show the name of an attendee, the desk will soon play host to a huge queue of people as the staff attempt to get to the bottom of why someone is not on there. An event management solution would reveal the problem quickly (i.e. failure to check out with ticket) to avoid all doubt over what went wrong.

The use of physical passes can assist staff in ensuring that attendees are granted access to the correct areas of the venue. There is a risk of these being lost, though, especially at events where lots of items are misplaced over the course of a few days. Attendees can gain access to all kinds of information regarding the event, but only through a printed resource - another item that has to be carried around and can get left behind.

After an event, there is nothing stopping a member of staff from sending the very same messages that would have gone through an event management platform via email. That said, most event managers will attest to this process being a great consumer of time as well as a hotbed for human error.

Overall, there is a more cumbersome process at hand; one that fails to reassure attendees and staff as they go about their business.

Technology for paid conferences

Overview

The private conference is another example of an event that benefits from the use of technology to handle guest registration and some of the tasks around it.

If a company decides to organise a conference where their attendees will have to pay a lot of money to, for example, listen to a talk from the best plastic surgeon in the world, they will be expected to deliver on a certain level of service.

These are three key things that can be done with event management technology at a private gathering:

- Create questions to gain an understanding of preferences, like food selection at an exclusive dinner, or choice of accommodation and transport for getting there.
- Avoid mistakes and offer great service through better accountability.
- Present a luxury experience via a mobile app, possibly to supplement a printed resource.

The process through technology

While the advantages of using an event management platform before, during and after a private conference are largely the same as with something a bit bigger, there are some nuances that set them apart.

For one, there is a need to really go above and beyond expectations to justify what can be a hefty price tag. Many of these events will appeal to those working in highly professional circles who know exactly what great service looks like. A personalised email might provide a nice touch, but is this an ample replacement for getting the same information at a faster pace?

It may be that the organiser requires the use of printed and digital materials to inform each attendee of where they need to be and at what time. The important thing is that both options are presented to the individual to choose between.

With additional services like food or accommodation, the member of staff in charge of each query should benefit from a single reference to help them identify the needs of attendees across every point of the event. As business travellers spend an average of £611 on each visit, their expectations are high and a simple mistake over a dietary requirement or transport arrangement can have drastic consequences.

In the post-event stage, we have the same benefits of using technology to guarantee a much quicker sending of "thank you" messages, and one that will not cause a drain on resources.

The process through email

While a personalised email can provide a welcoming touch on the first interaction, it fails to offer any accountability in the registration process. The smaller, more exclusive events must set the benchmark for service and there should be no second guesses over who is scheduled to attend.

Smaller gatherings lasting up to a day might not justify a purpose-built app, although the technology is there to provide every attendee with an online schedule without too much work from the organiser. For those thinking a printed resource may suffice, they should be wary of the digital natives who expect to be able to access information from the same provider of their emails, phone and internet.

An app with the right functionality can also present a way for attendees to network with each other and schedule meetings. Given the price of their tickets, there will certainly be some attendees trying to secure a return on investment by growing their list of contacts on the day.

The post-event wrap-up is made easier with a smaller audience. That said, the event management platform can help with logging each attendee's thoughts via feedback forms and other methods. That insight could prove highly valuable in the hosting of similar events while assuring the individual that their opinions are welcomed.

In summary

It's clear that advanced technology is helping event organisers carry out some of their most important tasks in the best way possible.

A unified system can help with consolidating huge reams of information, providing a more refined experience for the people that attend an event while removing some of the human error that we are naturally prone to.

While everyone will have opinions over just how an event should be managed, a good way to think about the differences between a dedicated platform and something like an email or even a paper-based system is by looking at the overall saving of time. Events are hectic, relentless and extremely demanding of the people that organise them. From welcoming attendees through the door to giving them a kind goodbye on their way out, there are necessary duties that swallow huge amounts of hours over the course of a year.

By relying on concepts such as automation to handle the registration process, conference organisers can spend more time on things that matter, like the offering of better services and actually growing the products they help create.

Registration is one area where there is no margin for error, yet some events will entrust it with outdated methods that are not fit for purpose. By adding new levels of accountability, efficiency and effectiveness to the mix, event management technology is earning plaudits on the big stage.

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