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July 2009



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Twitter Adds to InXpo's Virtual Show Experience

By Hil Anderson, senior editor

Chicago, IL – Twitter is now being used to enhance the communication and camaraderie among attendees of virtual trade shows, and could also create closer ties between live and digital events.

InXpo has taken a simple but important step in community building among attendees by incorporating Twitter directly into its virtual trade show platform. This allows participants to engage in online exchanges – ranging from serious networking to casual chit chat – with other attendees taking part in a virtual show or live exhibition.

Access to Twitter helps keep attendees engaged in the virtual event. It additionally provides the opportunity to offer parallel live and virtual trade shows in which those unable to attend the live event can follow along and interact with colleagues through cyberspace.

“It brings the virtual audience together with the physical show,” said Dennis Shiao, client services director at InXpo.

Shiao told *Trade Show Executive* adding a Twitter access button to the company's Virtual Event Platform 7.6 was a relatively simple technical task. “We have built it in as a standard feature,” he said. “It is no more than simply checking a box. We have tried to make it easy for our clients.”

Managers Taking to Twitter

Using Twitter in a virtual environment is not much different than it is at an actual

trade show. Show managers can fire off tweets about presentations that are about to begin while attendees keep tabs on their colleagues and kibitz about products and general goings-on.

And in the same way that timely tweets keep attendees engaged at a convention center, they give attendees of virtual shows an idea of when to log in and when to break for lunch or attend to other office chores.

Twitter's user-friendly and cost-effective nature has already made the technology a feature on a growing number of trade show websites. A recent survey conducted by the Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR) and George P. Johnson (GPJ) found that 62% of the show organizers they interviewed were using a social networking site such as Twitter and Facebook as part of their marketing strategy.

“Our clients are very much aware of Twitter and are already using it,” said Shiao.

Tying Virtual and Physical Shows Together

The use of social networking will likely become even more entrenched because attendees are progressively making use of it. In fact, they may actually come to depend on it as a means of keeping up with both the show schedule and their colleagues who are attending either online or in person. “People who are coming to shows want to reach out to the other attendees

in different ways,” Paul Salinger, vice president of marketing for Oracle, said during a recent webinar on the CEIR/GPJ survey. “Part of the job of the organizer is to now create a space for facilitation so there can be peer-to-peer or peer-to-brand communication.”

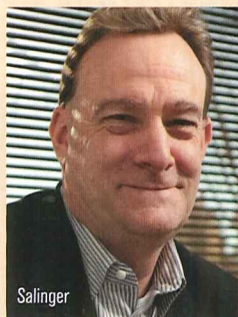
A stream of tweets prior to the show is an obvious way to build a single community of attendees from both the physical and virtual shows. Shiao says there could also be kiosks or display screens on the show floor that display tweets in real time so the attendees at the physical show can keep up with the action.

Purely Social

As is generally the case at physical shows, virtual Twitter is currently reserved for the attendees. Shiao said InXpo was currently nurturing its Twitter feature as a social-networking forum that is truly social. In other words, it is not used as an outlet for exhibitors' marketing materials nor is there a moderator who screens comments. “I think it is against the whole notion of social networking to have a moderator function,” he said. “We are just sitting back and letting it go.”

Given the ease and popularity of Twitter, InXpo probably can sit back and let its newest feature grow on its own.

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Salinger

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