

12 Marketing:

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Riding the Digital Content Wave

“Web 2.0 Technology as a revenue stream for associations”

In times of high economic volatility, associations strive for new ways to strengthen their field of specialty, offer state-of-the-art services to their members and seek out new long-term and future proof income opportunities. But while the traditional congress-centric revenue models of delegate participation fees, sponsorship and exhibition income can be incrementally optimised and increased through smart strategic operation in collaboration with a PCO, they also represent a fundamental barrier of growth. Real world constraints such as congress and exhibition space, manageability of huge numbers of participants, travel budget cutbacks and tight congress budgets (among others) limit the scalability of these classic income streams and give associations a run for their money.

A New Hope

One of the most valuable, and most underestimated, assets of a scientific association is its digital content, mainly stemming from congresses and educational activities for their members. Well-known examples of such digital content are presentation webcasts, speaker slides, electronically submitted abstracts, observational videos and digitised posters.

But even in the era of omnipresent digital lifestyle and its signature phenomena of Generation-Facebook, iPhone-hype and 24/7 online access, a congress's digital content is still most often distributed through CDs bundled with printed material, given away (or sold) on USB keys or simply printed to paper books. Moreover, even when offered online through the websites of scientific associations, the high potential of these digital assets for use in continuing online educational activities – as opposed to short-term value of periodic conferences – is largely neglected by associations and PCOs. Huge potential can be uncovered here, by achieving a shift from viewing digital content as a nice-to-have and short-lived gimmick for congress participants to take home as a souvenir, over to looking at such assets as what they really are: scientifically valuable material for longterm use in continuing online education as well as a sustainable source of ongoing revenues for associations that can be spent on fulfilling their mission.

So the questions here are: What are these hidden treasures buried within an association's pile of digital content and how can associations optimally cash-in on their value?

The Digital Gold Mine

When digital content is distributed by CD/DVD or other tangible media, it represents fixed content and therefore cannot change dynamically or be shared across several participants.

Any changes or interactions with such fixed content only affect individuals but are irretrievably lost to the community.

Through interaction of expert users with the content available on an association's educational web-portal, significant value is added that can be leveraged for cutting-edge features such as YouTube style multimedia presentation, state-of-the-art search and filtering techniques or Amazon-style recommender systems. Tracking every single user-content interaction (like searching, browsing, or viewing an item) and relating it to the professional profiles of the user group significantly charges its value and boosts content sharing, peer participation and communication among user communities. Active user-content interactions range from the well known user ratings (1 - 5 stars), user comments (a la Facebook), reviews and user tags (Amazon), up to shared expert blogs.

Uncovering the Treasure

The more content and the more users interacting with it, the higher the added value and the price tag that can be commanded within such environments. When offered in the form of an association's unified educational web-portal solution, spiced up with the possibilities of certifiable online courses, and rounded up with e-commerce functions, the outcome is a future-proof recipe for associations to significantly enhance the value of existing and future content and thereby gain a longterm strategic and economic advantage for the benefit of their members and their whole field of specialty.

In Conclusion

By establishing a focused approach towards a unified web-based educational platform to channel the Continuing Education activities of its members, an organisation can significantly strengthen its whole field of specialty.

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