



EXAMINING THE FUTURE OF **MEDICAL** SHOWS

A Special Report by
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Why Medical Conferences Will Remain a Draw for Physicians

By Hil Anderson, senior editor

Large events featuring throngs of well-heeled physicians and astute pharmaceutical sales reps have made medical conferences a coveted commodity for destination marketing organizations. Healthcare has taken on an increasingly upscale look in recent years thanks to continuing advances in medical technology and an aging Baby Boomer generation that ensures that business in the medical profession will remain good.

"Medical meetings are a major contributor to the advancement of the science," said Eric Allen, executive vice president of the Healthcare Convention & Exhibitors Association (HCEA). "The medical profession is one profession where you can say that the average consumer wants to see the science advancing."

"That means new products and breakthroughs are being developed, and as long as that is happening, physicians and scientists from around the world are going to want to get together to talk about them," he said.

And unlike industries dominated by corporations and companies that determine who goes to a trade show and when, the medical profession is made up of independent physicians who decide for themselves if they will attend, along with researchers who use conferences to present their latest findings.

"If the economy continues as it is, medical associations will probably need to work harder and be more creative in attracting attendees, but I also think medical societies have some built-in advantages," Allen said.

Survey Shows Doctors Trust Exhibits

The coffee mugs, pens and customized Post-it Notes are gone, but a new survey shows that physicians continue to trust medical exhibits.

The report unveiled at the *HCEA 2009 Annual Meeting* this Summer revealed that doctors

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are “less skeptical” about information they receive at a booth than the information they hear from field sales reps and even the advertising that appears in august medical journals. Translation: Doctors see exhibits as a useful source of information about the latest drugs and medical devices.

“It certainly shows the value of the live meeting experience,” Allen said. “They rated exhibits as best in terms of the messages they receive.”

The survey conducted by the University of Mississippi for HCEA was relatively small, involving 453 orthopaedic physicians. But HCEA sees it as the first step in a drive to gather more data on how doctors view the marketing

messages they receive. Analyzing sales leads doesn't particularly work at medical exhibitions because doctors generally prescribe medications directly to their patients who then obtain their meds from a pharmacy, rather than order them from the manufacturer.

“So this is the kind of data we believe higher level marketing professionals, brand leaders and on up into the C-suite at healthcare companies will take seriously because it has been vetted,” Allen said. “The ultimate goal is to have it published in a peer-review journal.”

Science Remains Top Draw

Publication in a medical journal is big in the world of medical conferences.

Attendees have long rated the release of new scientific research and the access to Continuing Medical Education (CME) courses as the top reasons to attend a conference. Throw in ample networking opportunities and an engaging host city and it is easy to see why conferences are attractive to doctors, researchers and other healthcare providers.

“The association-run meeting is a very powerful model,” Allen said. “A lot of physicians take great pride in their professional affiliations.”

“Becoming board certified in their specialty is often very important to their practices,” he added. “That often requires a high level of involvement in their particular society, which includes attending

Pharma 2020: Predictions on Medical Marketing

The overall marketing strategy for the medical industry will continue to evolve over the next decade. Predictions contained in a February study by PricewaterhouseCoopers see more consolidation, niche markets and electronic commerce in the industry, which will impact the science and exhibits presented at medical meetings.

- **E-prescribing.** Manufacturers of generic drugs are likely to get a boost as doctors are encouraged by the government and the insurance industry to prescribe cheaper drugs rather than name brands. Online prescribing programs will “remind” them about what is on the formulary.
- **Globalization.** Pharmaceutical companies will look more to worldwide markets with worldwide product launches. Asia is expected to become a hot market due to the aging of its population and greater disposable income.
- **Wider range of services.** Drug companies may begin offering products other than pills as overall health is emphasized. Home healthcare, nutritional counseling services and even physical fitness programs are possibilities.
- **Specialty meds.** The rise of generics and advances on genetic research allow development of drugs for more specific medical conditions. These new formulas, however, are generally much more expensive than the mass-market medications.
- **Bundling.** Healthcare “packaging” will create alliances among different companies. These teams will offer patients and their doctors “one-stop” disease-management for specific ailments.

the annual meeting.”

The marketing of conferences is not necessarily aimed at attracting private practice doctors to the exhibit hall. Kay Whalen, executive director of the American Academy of Allergy Asthma and Immunology, said, “The main reason physicians and other members attend our meeting is for the educational sessions.”

However, the exhibits are a powerful draw once the delegates arrive. Whalen said attendees are urged to visit the exhibits during the show in addition to the scientific sessions.

Underutilized Target Audience?

While research may be the theme of medical conferences, the “health” of the exhibits remains an important aspect. Connecting exhibitors with prescribing doctors means a positive ROI for the conference.

The same private practice doctors, who tend to trust the information they receive in the exhibit hall, offer a sizable target audience that may currently be underutilized. The breakdown of the 7,436 attendees at the June 9-13 *Endocrine Society 91st Annual Meeting* in Washington, DC listed 29.8% as private practitioners compared to just under 28% who were employed in clinical research.

As is the case with trade shows in general, medical exhibitions offer an atmosphere conducive to the exchange of ideas and shop talk among peers and among exhibitors. Being able to leave the office, patients and paperwork behind for the better part of a week to stroll among the booths is a luxury that benefits the physician and the exhibiting company. “When they are in their offices, they are usually pressed for time,” said Allen. “A lot of times, the sales rep can only come in, drop off a few samples, wave hello and then leave.”

Field Marketing Loses Steam

Allen’s point was illustrated earlier this year in an extensive white paper on medical marketing compiled by PricewaterhouseCoopers.

The report noted that the number of U.S. sales reps in the pharmaceutical industry doubled between 1995 and 2005, while the number of practicing physicians grew 26%. The result was a surge in the number of office visits and promotional mailings which became enough of a burden that 20% of doctors in the U.S. and Great Britain stated they instituted a complete ban on drug solicitors.

“The industry’s biggest markets are now saturated with sales representatives, and its selling techniques are becoming increasingly ineffective,” the report said.

Sponsorship Squeeze?

The statistics provided by PricewaterhouseCoopers are not the only factors favoring exhibits at medical conferences as a marketing strategy for pharmaceutical and device manufacturers.

Layoffs caused by consolidation and the recession have whittled down the oversized outside sales forces. In addition, the new standards adopted in recent years by the industry have put a damper on the relationship between sales reps and doctors.

Although much was made of the ban on booth giveaways, the exhibit floor remains a reliable source of information about new products.

At the same time, companies are also spending less on CME sponsorships. Whalen said a survey by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education concluded that CME sponsorships declined 14% last year. “I believe this trend will continue,” she said.

Most medical societies do not tie in CME sponsorships with exhibit sales. There has been a recent increase

in concern about sponsored educational sessions becoming platforms for sales pitches. A highly publicized letter published in April in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* called on medical societies to accept no funding from pharma other than journal advertising and exhibit sales.

A logical assumption would be that drug and device companies should spend more on exhibiting to reach their customers. The bottom line is one-on-one exchanges about new products will benefit the supplier, the physician and, ultimately, the patient.

Said Allen: “You have the possibility of having some shows in 2009 and 2010 with a very different dynamic than they may have had in 2008. But we in the convention industry believe that live meetings offer unparalleled learning and networking opportunities that no other medium can match, which accounts for why medical conventions have held up.”

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What's on the Horizon for Medical Conferences from an Audio-Visual Perspective?

By Hil Anderson, senior editor

Medical conferences are voracious consumers of audio-visual (AV) services and may soon see a peace dividend of sorts when the current crop of cutting-edge technologies migrates from the military to the civilian sector.

The U.S. armed forces use the latest in high-definition imagery and computer networking in support of their combat and intelligence operations. That technology will eventually work its way to exhibit floors and lecture halls, predicts Al Dyess, vice president and general manager of PRG Corporate & Tradeshow Services (PRG), which has a strategic audio-visual alliance with GES Exposition Services.

"If you look at plasma video displays, they followed the end of the Gulf War," Dyess said. "As Iraq winds down and Afghanistan plays out, there will likely be a 'surge,' if you'll pardon the expression, of technology coming into the market."

What the newest gadgetry will be is anyone's guess, but it is a good bet that it will turn up first at medical conferences. The emphasis on scientific research and Continuing Medical Education (CME) courses means a flood of slides and studies that these days must be available online and in sharp focus by the time the first keynote speakers take the podium.

"Nobody is more demanding on themselves or their suppliers than doctors," said Jim Russell, Freeman senior vice president of event technology & AV. "They have to be perfectionists in what they do so they, in turn, demand quite a bit from their suppliers."

And service providers including Freeman, PRG and a host of smaller local firms are answering the demand with strategies and products that aren't classified as top secret, but are eye-popping nonetheless. "They lean on us as the experts to provide the technology," Russell told *Trade Show Executive*.

"They come to us with an issue and we look for a way to solve that."

Upscale AV Shopping List

The AV shopping list for medical conferences is high-end. It focuses on imagery and managing the flow of information used in presentations and the CME sessions that are the bread and butter of medical event organizers.

The modern medical meeting is flush with networked systems that hold hundreds of pages of scientific research, slides and video. At the same time, high-definition video display panels that are de rigueur in both war rooms and living rooms have become standard features in breakout rooms and exhibit booths.

"Medical conventions are one of the largest consumers of AV," said Russell. "Corporate customers are probably the biggest, but medical meetings are very heavy users. Their attendees participate in events to earn CMEs, so they are there specifically to look and listen, and the audio-visual systems deliver content in an engaging way."

The current trends in audio-visuals at medical meetings are based on high-speed Internet service that can handle heavy loads of video and data for multiple users. The result is an event that is incredibly streamlined and accessible to organizers, attendees, exhibitors and presenters at the touch of a button. "Just about every piece of AV equipment these days runs on wireless or has an input for a Cat 5 cable," Russell said. "It can now be done because bandwidth is much more affordable."

It Starts with the Server

Most modern convention centers and conference hotels offer built-in Internet service that can accommodate the IT demands of some robust meetings. Scientific events have an enormous additional burden due to the large number of presentations.

The AV contractors for such events often truck their own computer server to the venue to provide dedicated on-site service. Authors of written and poster presentations can upload their work into the server before

the meeting begins and have it available at the touch of a button upon arrival. "We then push it out to the appropriate room at the right time, according to the conference schedule," Russell said.

The Screen is Green

Digital data can make a major dent in the amount of paper consumed by any trade show, particularly medical shows. New research that used to be presented on posters or in the form of printed handouts is now available on computer terminals. Instead of having a stack of copies on hand, attendees can e-mail the work they are interested in directly to their own addresses.

The screens themselves are also evolving. Displays using light-emitting diode (LED) technology use less electricity than plasma and other early models, which benefits the bottom line of the organizer's energy budget. LED screens are also lighter weight, which trims a little off drayage costs. "LED is a greener product," said Dyess. "Our industry is very focused on that and the manufacturers are responding very well to that demand."

Clearer Picture

Video displays are always an eye-catcher in the exhibit hall, but they take on an extra importance at medical conferences. Large, high-definition screens allow audiences to see the fine details of a surgical procedure or a microscope slide. "The colors of tissues or whatever else they are articulating show up better with greater picture density," said Russell.

The development of ultra-thin screens with high-resolution has made it easier for video "walls" to be set up for keynote presentations and on the exhibit floor. DJ Lyons, senior project manager at PRG, said a key has been reducing the size of the frame around the screen, known as a bezel, so that multiple screens can be combined into one big, dazzling display. "Narrow-bezel technology is really compressing them down," he said. "It allows multi-screen images that are almost seamless, and with resolution that is on its way

to becoming fully high-definition."

Lyons said demand for high-definition at conferences has picked up in part because high-definition television is more common at home. The ability of large screens to display high-definition images is improving, as is camera capability. "You will soon see nearly 'in-the-room' displays for people who can't be in the room," he said.

On the Horizon

No one really knows what the military might chip into the trade show AV portfolio in the coming years, but organizers may rest assured that civilian companies are not sitting still.

Lyons said engineers around the world were working on higher-resolution flexible screens and souped-up scanning systems that instantly project a printed document on a computer screen.

A particularly hot area of research is 3-D imagery. "Holograms and 3-D are just some of the cutting edge stuff out there," Lyons said. "There is a lot in the development stage and bringing it to the trade show environment is on its way."

"If they can start to energize 3-D teleconferencing, then the idea of an audience being 'in the operating room' is more viable. You could use it in a room with a 1,000 people. That's an end we have to stay connected with," he added.

Russell said the trade show industry was at a "turning point" in terms of the technology that will be driven by more-robust networks. The key for AV companies will be identifying new applications that will benefit trade show organizers.

That means companies such as Freeman and PRG will be hitting the show floor themselves at major high-tech exhibitions, and even stationing representatives in locations such as Tokyo that are research hot beds.

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