

Trade Show Technology Evolves on Path to Greater Efficiency, Smaller Size

By Hil Anderson, senior editor

Back in the day, about the only things involved in organizing a trade show that would fit into the palm of the hand were a tape measure and a corporate credit card. The breakneck development of software and cell phones has brought forth a slew of new technologies that organizers, exhibitors and attendees can use on their smart phones.

Laptop computers are starting to be thought of as boat anchors that have to be lugged from session to session. Brochures and business cards are just so much paper, and even the venerable e-mail blast is considered passé in some marketing circles.

Add into the mix the unpredictable dynamics of social media and the elusive numbers game of ROI measurement and you have an industry in which cutting-edge technology is becoming a top priority for show organizers who want to maintain a prominent role in the industries they serve.

"This is like going to Summer school. We have to learn how to deal with the rapid changes," Steven Hacker, president of the International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE), said this Winter as he overlooked the exhibit hall at *EXPO! EXPO!*, which hosted an increasing number of booths occupied by technology companies.

"The question is," Hacker said, "is there more technology available or are there just more technology providers to choose from?"

The answer is likely that there are both new companies seeking a share of the trade show market and a bevy of new ideas to simplify and improve the way tasks of various sizes are tackled. *Trade Show Executive* once again has combed the high-tech landscape for companies offering solutions that are breaking new ground in show management. Here is what we found.

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Onstream Media

Virtual trade shows continue to carve out a role in the exhibition industry as additional revenue streams for organizers of physical events. Onstream Media and other providers of virtual show technology see advances in rich media technology and a highly web-savvy attendee pool as a combination that will make virtual shows even more attractive as an add-on to the actual event. Virtual shows are not new, but their sophistication continues to evolve and systems are constantly being tweaked.



Onstream's MarketPlace 365 platform, for example, is simple to deploy and handles a wide range of content management and analytics. It also offers opportunities for organizers to sell virtual booth space, offer pay-per-view content and provide a home base for social media communities. "MarketPlace365 uses the best elements of web-based lead generation to drive more business at a lower cost and in a more measurable way that better quantifies their ROI," said Randy Selman, chairman, president and CEO of Onstream.

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Google Wave

Technology buffs at the International Association of Exhibitions & Events' (IAEE) EXPO! EXPO! agreed that the launch of Google Wave would be the next big thing in social media and event planning.

Google Wave is designed to facilitate online group discussions. It could become the platform of choice for show organizers seeking to bring widely dispersed stakeholders into their planning process. There were even predictions it could cut in on Twitter by limiting the participants to those who are invited.

Google Wave has been described as a mix of instant messaging and e-mail that can be followed and used in real-time by a large number of individuals. It has multimedia capabilities and was designed for use in a business setting by companies with staff based in different locations. For example, documents can be edited and commented on, which facilitates

the anticipated growth in attendees and association members providing feedback and having a voice in the planning of educational sessions and networking opportunities.

ethnoMetrics Inc.

Having an eye in the sky can assist trade show organizers to eliminate traffic flow bottlenecks on the floor, and also with their sales and exhibitor relations efforts.

ethnoMetrics Inc., a unit of GES Exposition Services, has been monitoring the comings and goings in exhibit halls for some seven years. Its primary aim is to identify and eliminate bottlenecks on the exhibit floor. The ethnoMetrics system also assists exhibitors with the design of their booths and generally makes the show as pleasant and productive an experience as possible.

The comprehensive view can also spot flaws in the way the exhibitors exhibit, particularly in regards to the amount of space they secure. Often, a cost-conscious exhibitor will save a few bucks by renting a smaller space and wind up with cramped quarters that quickly fill up with attendees and leave people milling around in the aisles. "What we have found in many cases is that exhibitors put too much equipment and too much stuff in general in their space," said Dave Fellers, president of ethnoMetrics.

The ethnoMetrics system is based on a network of surveillance cameras mounted above the exhibit floor. The unblinking cameras record the entire show, which is then analyzed by a seasoned team of analysts in the same way football coaches will break down the films of their last game.

"Our staff in Michigan will physically count the bodies in the exhibit area and produce a detailed report on the statistics with recommendations on how they can make improvements," said Fellers.

One particular way traffic analysis can improve things for organizers is to spot things other than logjams in the aisles. Sometimes, crowds can bypass a booth that may not be manned correctly, or at all. Attendees can find themselves ignored by an understaffed exhibitor or blocked by a poorly placed piece of furniture. "Maybe it is just a big exhibit that everyone wants to see," Fellers said. "But only 27% to 30% of your typical exhibitors interact with attendees in the proper manner."

Reach Dave Fellers at (702) 263-1517 or dfellers@ethnometrics.com



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Lead Retrieval?



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SMART-reg International, Inc.



The real-time ability to instantly “blackball” a lost or stolen name badge is the latest step forward at trade shows or corporate meetings where intellectual property theft can be a major concern.

The SMART ALEC (Access Limiting Espionage Countermeasure) comes from SMART-reg International, Inc. and addresses a serious concern despite the playful title. The need for tight “eyes-only” security can extend beyond the obvious government and defense shows and into civilian sectors such as high-tech and pharmaceuticals.

People lose badges at every trade show and can always be accommodated with a new one. The old badge can be voided on the registration database, but there is often a lag between then and the time it is recorded on an on-site badge reader. That raises the risk of an agent from a competitor company or nation donning the missing badge and sitting in on what was supposed to be a closed-door presentation.

SMART ALEC allows the registration desk to instantly list a missing badge as “blackballed” and deny access to the bearer when the badge is scanned at the door. The wireless technology automatically feeds the information into the readers. “The updates are instantaneous,” said SMART-reg President & CEO Arnie Roberts. The range of the system is enough that it can be used even for citywide events held at multiple locations.

The added layer of security doesn’t reduce the efficiency of the system. Roberts said a recent high-security event deployed SMART ALEC and was able to scan 750 people into their sessions in six minutes. “It worked like a charm,” he said.

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Kaon Interactive

Kaon Interactive has developed a new concept in video conferencing which puts an exhibiting company’s engineers and technology experts virtually in the booth to answer any tough questions from an attendee.

The next step forward in Kaon’s v-OSK product line is v-Connect Pro. v-Connect Pro facilitates two-way video conversations between product experts located anywhere in the world and a potential customer who stops by the booth seeking technical information that the sales reps on the show floor may not have.



The system adds a “Connect me with an expert” button on the video screen of the v-OSK at the booth. When the button is pressed, an e-mail or page is sent through a cloud-computing environment to a designated company expert at the office. That person then simply logs in via a standard Internet

browser and conducts a one-on-one conversation with the attendee that includes the ability to jointly discuss drawings, slides and 3-D graphics. “The expertise now goes beyond the booth staff,” said Kaon President & CEO Gavin Finn. “They don’t have to give a prospective customer the standard, ‘We’ll get back to you’ answers.”

The benefits for organizers are increased ROI for exhibitors and higher savings on travel budgets. Since product experts are just a click away, exhibitors don’t have to fly them to the show and keep them away from their desk for the better part of a week. They can also exhibit in a larger number of smaller events with minimal staff.

“They will have access to all of the people they need without having to actually bring them to the show,” Finn said.

Reach Gavin Finn at (978) 823-0111 or gfinn@kaon.com

CompuSystems, Inc.

CompuSystems, Inc. released a series of new web-based dashboards, including one that gives show managers a one-stop location to oversee the mountain of data associated with putting on an exhibition.

The system is highlighted by easy viewing of show metrics, data comparisons and custom report compilation that can be carried out in seconds. “We’re excited to be able to provide a cutting-edge tool to our customers that will save so much of their time in an environment where it is becoming more and more valuable,” said Chris Williams, senior vice president of sales for CompuSystems.



CompuSystems also has a dashboard that exhibitors can use to handle their ordering, lead retrieval and customer invitations. Another dashboard is set up for attendees to organize their show schedule, obtain registration codes and view their badges.

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Ungerboeck Systems International

Ungerboeck Systems International (USI) has made the jump to a web browser environment.

Ungerboeck Software Version 20.1 is the fourth generation of USI’s event management software and does not require the use of the client’s server. “Recent advances in web development and software usability have made it possible for us to deliver the same or greater levels of functionality as our previous versions,” said USI President Krister Ungerboeck. “Web technology previously was not ready to provide this feature-rich environment for USI customers.”

The migration is more than a matter of convenience. USI’s software is capable of tracking a client’s internal and external communications and consolidating the data into a package that is usable for real-time monitoring and analysis. This allows information to flow among the sales service and operations staffs without the need for re-keying.

Ungerboeck Software delivers to the customer more than 30 modules that are used for different show management tasks, including customer relations, accounting and floor plans. “The software also actually learns how people are using the application and then tailors itself to maximize each person’s productivity,” Ungerboeck said.

Reach Krister Ungerboeck at (636) 688-2000 or krister.ungerboeck@ungerboeck.com

Lygase Consulting, LLC

The RFID industry wants to make its sensors standard equipment in every major convention center.

Venues that purchase a permanent network of RFID sensors can offer it as an added feature to show organizers. The technology can be used for traffic analysis and for lead capture by exhibitors.

By installing a permanent network of RFID sensors, show organizers can bring in their preferred RFID service provider without having to foot the bill for renting and setting up a temporary network. Individual show organizers who have embraced the concept of RFID tracking have pointed to cost as a disincentive.

Ketrus Collins, president and CEO of Lygase Consulting, LLC, said his company offers a share of its revenue from a trade show to the venue. In addition, venues can make use

of the network to keep track of the movement of its own employees and equipment.

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DubMeNow, Inc.

Text messages have made mobile phones such a simple and ubiquitous means of communication that it comes as no surprise that they may soon take over the task of exchanging business cards.



DubMeNow, Inc. promises to eliminate the need to stash and sort stacks of cards picked up on the show floor by turning smart phones into repositories for the contact information currently found on embossed cardstock. “Our goal is to make the entire event experience more interactive and mobile, from registering for sessions to connecting with other attendees and exhibitors,” said Manoj Ramnani, CEO of DubMeNow.

The mobile phone application automatically downloads business card information from another person’s mobile phone. That information can automatically go into the phone’s address book and can even instantly announce the new contact on Twitter, if so desired. And not to worry if you can’t instantly recall who this new person in your phone is; DubMeNow has a feature that lists the date of the information swap and the map location where it took place.

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3D Media Group

Easy access to a wide variety of social media platforms is a good way for show organizers to hedge their bets against becoming stuck with an “un-hip” outlet.

A dashboard created by 3D Media Group allows the social media maven for a particular show organizer or association to access LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook or whatever other platform they want to use. The dashboard also allows for analysis of the traffic and a look at what the users are saying and what platform they prefer using. “There are some platforms that are going to lose users, as was the case with MySpace, which went south and became un-hip,” said Chris Dunhill, CEO of 3D Media Group.

Dunhill said show organizers by and large have been scrambling aboard the social media bandwagon with varying degrees of success. The ever-changing landscape of software, applications and user preference is confusing enough that it

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makes sense to hedge one's bets when selecting a format.

The open-source nature of 3D Media Group's technology means the latest digital gadgets can be added quickly and at minimal cost. By utilizing the right applications, 3D Media Group can reach out across multiple platforms and provide the necessary analytics that will keep their social media campaigns fresh and equally as relevant to their users.

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Convention Data Services

Communicating by text message is addictively easy and convenient and may soon replace the nice volunteers at convention center information desks.



Convention Data Services (CDS) launched a texting system that show managers can use to answer questions from attendees and send out announcements during their show. Developed by GuestAssist, the technology allows attendees to send in simple queries about the show schedule, room locations, ground transportation and other matters that require a quick response. "They can send a text from their own phones on the show floor and get a response right away," said David Lawton, vice president of sales and marketing. "With 85% of consumers carrying mobile phones, this is a tool show management can use to enhance the show experience."

The opt-in system can also be used to report spills, locked doors and other operational glitches. Texts can also be sent out to attendees informing them of schedule and room changes or an emergency. "But most show managers realize there are very few actual emergencies," Lawton said. "So, you can usually pre-plan a lot of the information based on anticipated questions."

The routine nature of the communications means that pre-written responses can be fired off by one or two staff members. The system can, of course, also be used to send out reminders

about booth offerings from sponsors and individual exhibitors to attendees or groups based on their particular interests.

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Turning Technologies, LLC

One of the simplest and most established means of engaging trade show attendees is when speakers ask questions. Turning Technologies, LLC has introduced a compact and complete keypad that attendees can use to send in their responses.

The ResponseCard RF LCD is a diminutive handheld keypad that is about the size of a credit card, runs on lithium batteries and has a range of 200 feet. An added feature is the liquid-crystal display that shows which channel the device has been set to and the answer they have selected. "We wanted to preserve its compact size as well as provide that additional feedback to attendees," said CEO Mike Broderick.

Broderick added that the RF LCD line contains some internal upgrades that improve the touch of the keypad and the speed of processing responses.

Reach Mike Broderick at (330) 746-3015 or broderick@turningtechnologies.com

Black Box Corporation

Getting everyone at a presentation on the same page has been made easier by Black Box Corporation's new wireless projector that allows presentations to be viewed on audience members' smart phones.

The new Plus version of the VGA Wireless Video Presentation System (VPS) is an upgrade to the previous version that enabled attendees to follow along on a laptop computer even from the seats in the back of the room. "No more lugging a laptop along to a meeting," says Mario Calabro, multimedia products manager at Black Box. "To share information through a projector, just log on from your PDA and begin streaming images from wherever you are."

The projector transmits the slides to the room and includes a "plug-and-show" token that can be installed to facilitate quick set-up by presenters. The token allows users to simply plug their laptops into the projector and display it on the main screen and on the laptops and PDAs in the audience without the need for additional cables.

The system is robust enough that it can run animation and real-time audio and video streaming. The VPS Plus also supports 4-to-1 split-screen projection so that as many as four separate users' screens can be displayed at the same time for comparison purposes.

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