

– A SPECIAL REPORT BY –
Trade Show Executive

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REGISTRATION STRATEGIES

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Event ROI



BY DANICA TORMOHLN, *editor-at-large*

About one month before the 2013 *International Contemporary Furniture Fair (ICFF)* was set to open May 18-21 at the Jacob K. Javits Center in New York, GLM Vice President Kevin O'Keefe beta-tested a new technology platform called InGo in conjunction with the show's registration system from Convention Data Services (CDS). InGo facilitates social invites through contacts in LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and Google. Here's how it worked:

Prospective attendees — interior designers, architects and retailers — were given the option of registering using LinkedIn or proceeding through to the traditional registration page. For the 800 attendees who participated — an adoption rate of 5% — InGo pulled their LinkedIn data, populated the registration form, and asked them a handful of demographic questions from the show organizer.

Then InGo pulled the registrant's most relevant connections based on title, company and other key words — qualified prospects for the event — and offered to send personalized or more generic show invites to their network.

During a two-week test period, those 800 attendees — out of a total attendance of 29,000 — invited an average of four contacts each. Of those 2,400 additional social invites, 480 actually registered for the show with a 52% conversion rate on site. "Most of those invitations were sent to new prospects who were not in our existing database," said O'Keefe.

Since then, GLM has been testing it with other shows and is planning to use InGo through the entire registration cycle for the 2014 show. "If we can realize an adoption rate of 20%, that would be huge," said O'Keefe.

Indeed, O'Keefe said he paid \$3 to \$4 per socially acquired qualified attendee vs. the \$25 to \$40 per attendee he usually spends on traditional marketing campaigns. "I think this product is about to go viral in the trade show industry," he said.

Major independent show organizers are already jumping on the bandwagon. Hanley-Wood, UBM and Reed Exhibitions recently announced they will also be testing the technology with some shows.

Today's most successful registration strategies, like this one, are capitalizing on technology, data, mobility and integration. And registration and technology companies are responding by rolling out hundreds of new products and upgraded services to enhance the attendee experience, extend your show's reach and actually increase attendance.

Trade Show Executive interviewed leading show organizers, as well as registration and technology experts, to offer insight on what's working now, what's hot and what's next. Here, you'll find the latest techniques and technologies that are making a splash in 2013.

Mobility = Flexibility

Mobile technology is impacting just about every aspect of registration and lead-retrieval and opening up more and more possibilities. "Mobility continues to be the No. 1 trend for registration and lead-retrieval in 2013," said Shawn Pierce, division president, registration & housing, Experient.

Cloud-based services and tablet technology have allowed shows to provide distributed registration throughout convention centers and at remote locations such as hotels. This trend continued to gain steam in 2013. Look for it to grow even more in 2014.

As trade shows continue to move away from mailing badges to attendees before the show, many found this created some challenges with long lines and bottlenecks at the convention center. Distributed registration can help to dramatically reduce wait times for badge pick-up and improve the customer experience on site.

"We will be working with *International CES* to offer more than 25 different



what's WORKING NOW

- **Exhibitor Invites 2.0.** Show organizers can and should utilize exhibitor invitations to their customers, but it hasn't always been easy to make that happen. CompuSystems offers an exhibitor invites application, which is integrated in the exhibitor registration dashboard. For the 2013 *Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) Annual Conference & Exposition*, 22% of exhibitors used our product, said Chris Williams, senior vice president of CompuSystems Inc.
- **Social Savings & Promotion.** For the *Yankee Dental Congress* in January 2013, more than 700 registrants took advantage of a \$5 savings they received if they posted a message about the event on their Facebook wall. YDC worked with CDS to process the discount and posting. Another event is trying it in November, said David Lawton, executive vice president, sales and marketing for CDS.
- **Near-Field Communication (NFC).** A number of shows, particularly international ones, are using NFC-technology. While it has yet to gain widespread acceptance in the U.S., *International CES*, the No. 1 show on *Trade Show Executive's Gold 100* in 2013, will deploy NFC technology for the first time in January. The good news: The cost for NFC-enabled badges continues to decline. "It costs about 25 cents per badge for NFC," said Arnie Roberts, president and CEO, SMART-reg International. "85% of our shows use NFC."

registration locations in 2014,” said Ivan Lazarev, owner, ITN International. Distributed registration sites will be available at all exhibit venues and select show hotels, as well as at the Bally’s/Paris Monorail Station and baggage claim at McCarran International Airport in Las Vegas.

Others will also be testing registration on shuttle bus routes. “In the 1st Quarter of 2014, we will be implementing registration badge printing when attendees and exhibitors get off the shuttle buses at the venue,” said David Lawton, executive vice president, sales and marketing for CDS.

As an added benefit, show organizers will be able to better utilize premium space at convention centers that was reserved for registration.

Mobile Optimization

Adults in the U.S. are expected to spend an average of two hours and 21 minutes a day on smartphones and tablets in 2013, according to a recent study by eMarketer. In 2010, U.S. adults spent

only 24 minutes on mobile devices.

To capitalize on this trend, mobile-optimized registration web sites have become the norm for most of the larger trade shows. “From January through June 2013, there were 9.9 million hits on mobile registration sites for the 80 events we produced during that time-frame,” said Lawton. “Over the last three quarters, we’ve seen an increase of 3% to 5% each quarter.”

While usage continues to rise dramatically, conversion rates on mobile are still relatively low. “A higher percentage of exhibitors and attendees still register via their desktops,” said Lazarev. “There are certainly more who are using tablets, but I don’t think there are many people registering on their smartphones.”

For the *Automotive Aftermarket Industry Week*, which is held annually in Las Vegas, 15% of attendees registered via mobile devices, said Chris Williams, senior vice president, CompuSystems Inc. “Among all of our customers, an average of 3% to 5% of attendees register via mobile devices.”

Leveraging Your Data

Think about how much data you gather about attendees during the registration and lead capture process. You can track every session they click on before they register, which booths they visited, appointments they set with exhibitors, what product categories interest them and so much more.

“Show organizers want to know the buying and behavioral patterns of attendees before, at and after the show,” said Arnie Roberts, president and CEO, SMART-reg International. “If you can tell exhibitors that there were 5,000 attendees who were looking for their products, you can share and sell this data to your exhibitors,” said Arnie Roberts.

The *International Woodworking Fair (IWF)*, which is held every two years in Atlanta, is using Experient’s EDGE product to gather data about attendees and make more informed marketing decisions. “We can track the effectiveness of a third-party list,” said Jim Wulfekuhle, vice president, sales & marketing, IWF. “In the past, most of the data we collected was never used. Now we are using the data to determine how much we spend on marketing and when. We are also expanding sectors and building new product categories and pavilions based on data.”

Data Integration is Key

Suppliers are also developing custom application protocol interfaces (APIs) to help show organizers integrate registration data with event and association management systems, as well as customer relationship management software like Salesforce.com and Personify.

Through data integration, associations can offer membership renewals and discounts in real-time on the registration page. For example, the American Association of Clinical Chemistry processed 300 new and renewed memberships during registration, said Lawton. “You aren’t losing the registration during the process,” said Lawton. “It’s a seamless experience in real time.”



what's HOT

Other companies, such as Expo Logic, are developing customized registration solutions that allow groups to process registration through their association management systems using Expo Logic's interface. "For some customers, this means they are managing their own registrations and hiring us to assist on-site with equipment and staffing," said Jeff Cooper, president and CEO, Expo Logic.

But integration can be expensive and time-consuming for show organizers on the front end based on the degree of interaction. "What you put in is what you are going to get out," said Dharmesh Dayabhai, vice president of marketing for Streampoint Solutions. "You have to have clean data. If it's not input properly, it won't come out properly. That's certainly one of the stumbling blocks."

Enhancing the Attendee Experience

Registration vendors are rolling out more features for attendees on their mobile apps. For example, Experient offers a shuttle bus tracking feature, which provides an estimated time of arrival for buses at a specific location. ITN launched a new app that provides attendees with information on the nearest registration site based on their location.

In the 4th Quarter, CDS is rolling out a registration confirmation for Apple's Passbook at the *ASCB Annual Meeting*, a conference and exhibition that draws about 8,000 cell biologists. The QR confirmation code in Passbook can be scanned on-site to print badges and allow admission to ticketed events and sessions.

Trends in Lead-Retrieval

The trend of moving from hardware to software continues to gain ground. A few years ago, suppliers were concerned about whether they would be able to shift revenues from hardware to software, but it appears exhibitors are embracing the mobile app lead-capture technologies, which offer deeper data and more efficient follow-up. "Instead of renting two or three devices, exhibi-

• **Single Sign-On (SSO).** Basically, a user logs in once – to registration or membership – and gains access to all systems without being prompted to log in again at each of them. The benefits of using SSO include reducing password fatigue and increasing the likelihood that you won't lose a customer. For the upcoming *American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) International Mechanical Engineering Congress & Exposition*, management is working with SMART-reg International to offer SSO for the event. "They can track every contact the attendee has with the association across the organization," said Roberts. "We have 34 concurrent sessions running at one time, with a total of 600 sessions," said Phyllis Klasky, director, events management, ASME. "We need to closely track who attends which sessions, and we are able to do that more efficiently now."

• **Concierge-Style Registration.** For example, GLM uses line busters carrying handheld devices to process registrations at convention center entrances as attendees get off shuttle buses. Line busters wearing green hats and t-shirts with the show's logo intercept attendees before they get in line and scan their bar codes to speed up badge print-out and pick-up. GLM has used line busters at all the shows they hold at the Jacob K. Javits Center in New York. "We had 10 line busters at the *NYNow* in 2013, and we are planning to 50% more next year," said Michael Clapperton, CIO, GLM. "It has freed up prime real estate at Javits for revenue-generating opportunities."

• **Seamless Processing of Registration and Membership.** For example, Expo Logic created a customized registration solution for the *Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO) Annual Meeting*. "ARVO can process registrations directly through AVECtra, its membership management technology, using Expo Logic's interface," said Cooper.

"For attendees to present abstracts at our annual meeting, they must be



members, so we have a lot of new memberships and renewals during the registration process," said Francis George, director of membership and global development, ARVO. "Attendees sign on once, and we can process registration and membership in one transaction. It has increased efficiency for our staff because we spend less time with manual processing, and it provides a seamless experience for attendees."

what's NOT

• **Registration on Smartphones.** Some attendees are registering on tablets, but virtually no one is registering on their smartphones.

• **Plastic Badge Holders.** "More of our customers are using durable stock for badges that don't require plastic badge holders," said Williams. "About 10% of our events are using them because they can save money and be more green. As long as you can print color for categories, you don't need holders. I think badge holders could be obsolete in a few years."

• **Later Registrations.** "We've seen that late registration has stabilized," said Pierce. "Most attendees are registering 4 to 6 weeks out. That can increase if registration is required before booking hotels in cities where rooms at headquarters hotels are harder to come by."

what's NEXT

tors are deploying 20 to 30 apps,” said Lawton. From June 2012 to June 2013, CDS reported a 140% growth in app usage across 160 shows, said Lawton.

Others agree. “We’ve seen huge growth in our mobile lead-retrieval usage, which is up 200% over last year,” said Williams. “Apps make up 20% of total exhibitor revenues, and that could double in 2014. Desktop data recorders will be gone in the next year or two, and we expect that we will only be offering smartphone and tablet solutions within the next three to four years.”

Lead-retrieval apps are offering loads of new features and benefits. With SMART-reg, “exhibitors can add images, take voice notes, and schedule follow-ups,” said Roberts.

With Experient, organizers are able to evaluate real-time exhibitor performance data and compare it to their competition. “Organizers and exhibitors can see how they’re performing during the event so they can refocus their strategies,” said Pierce. “This valuable information gives substance to ROI and marketing discussions for both parties.”

By the Numbers

Good news for show organizers: Don’t expect to pay more for registration services in 2014. But if you are going out for bid, you may not get the same deals as you did during the economic recession. Some suppliers say prices have stabilized as the economy has improved and competitors are less likely to cut deals to retain or gain business. Others say there’s still a lot of pressure on pricing.

Exhibitor counts and net square footage are on the rise across most industries, which bodes well for registration and lead-retrieval services companies. In the 2nd Quarter of 2013, the number of exhibitors grew 1.8% and exhibit space grew 2.6% over the previous year, according to *Trade Show Executive’s Dashboard of Monthly Trade Show Metrics*. As a result, many registration vendors are reporting solid gains in revenue in 2013.

“Our same-show revenue growth is in the low single digits,” said Pierce.

Despite the increase, “margins are going down,” said Lazarev. Why? Most vendors continue to invest in research and development of new technologies, and most are rolling out new features and services that are value-adds to existing products. Typically, show organizers aren’t willing to pay more for new features, but vendors need to offer them to stay competitive.

More and more shows are asking for complex enterprise-style applications from registration contractors. “That puts even more pressure on exhibitors to augment that revenue,” said Lazarev. “Shows are asking for more tracking, data and analysis. It’s not something that operations is willing to pay for, but we may be able to tap marketing dollars.”

“Our exhibitor revenues are up 7% to 8% year-over-year, said Williams. “I believe registration prices have hit the bottom. Prices were just too low relative to the amount of software development registration companies are required to do. It has stabilized and will probably increase a bit over the next 12 to 18 months.”

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- **Indoor Global Positioning.** GPS technology is great outdoors, but indoor global positioning is still not there yet. Registration companies would like to offer better tools for indoor mapping. “Frankly, most convention centers don’t have the bandwidth and equipment to make that happen,” said Pierce. “We are excited about the possibilities with the new tech upgrades at the Las Vegas Convention Center.”
- **Registration through Facebook.** For the 2013 *Face & Body Northern California*, Allured Business Media worked with CDS to offer registration directly from its Facebook page. “We posted discounted promotion codes on Facebook, and fans could register for our event without leaving Facebook,” said Sandy Chapin, vice president, events, Allured. While this approach may not be effective for some b-to-b shows, the annual conference and expo, which attracts 3,700 skin care professionals, has nearly 5,500 likes on its Facebook page. “We were not able to track how many attendees actually registered on Facebook in 2013, but the investment to get it up and running was minimal and 5% of registrants used the Facebook promo code we posted,” said Chapin. Lawton said CDS will be able to set up tracking of Facebook registrations in 2014.

Indoor Mapping by Google



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Plus: SMART-reg introduces Single Sign-On (SSO)

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- Single Sign-On encourages user engagement with your organization. It removes the hassle when a user registers for any of your event offerings.
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