There’s no denying that mobile continues to dominate tech innovations in the trade show industry. Just about every new product introduced in recent months has a mobile component. Today’s show organizers, exhibitors and attendees want access to everything, everywhere. Beyond mobile, show organizers are looking for solutions to help them engage exhibitors and attendees before, during and after the trade show. Industry suppliers are responding with a variety of new products and services from content syndication to e-commerce platforms. What’s trending in 2014? Trade Show Executive interviewed industry tech suppliers to find out. Here, we present our annual review of tech trends to watch and a roundup of the latest solutions to help organizers, attendees and exhibitors maximize their show experience.
Focus on Ease of Use
Tech suppliers are enhancing the functionality of current offerings and rolling out new tools that are more intuitive and integrated across platforms. As major brands in our consumer lives continue to raise the bar, exhibitors and attendees expect the same seamless experience in their business lives. In 2013, most industry suppliers implemented single sign-on access to systems across all platforms.

“This No. 1 feature on most web sites is the back button,” said Steve Gebhart, vice president, digital product development and client solutions, Global Experience Specialists (GES). “Ease of use is a key part of GES’s ongoing tech initiatives. We are looking at where users spend time and what they are coming there for. Even simple navigation changes can have a big impact on ease of use.”

Automation, Automation, Automation
In 2014, shows will be able to take advantage of new tools that automate everything from marketing to content. New tech products can sift through vast amounts of data and turn it into usable applications for exhibitors and attendees.

For Hasley Wood’s Greenbuild, about 1,000 attendees posted that they were attending the event on social networks such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. “That generated more than 600,000 social media impressions,” said Michael Barnett, CEO, InGo. With one click, users could also send email invitations to their social networks. On average, each social registrant spent time and what they are coming there for. Even simple navigation changes can have a big impact on ease of use.”

Convergence of Technologies at Events
“The physical and digital worlds are converging,” said Gebhart. A number of consumer brands are already capitalizing on this trend, and applications for the trade show industry may gain ground in 2014. For example, Walt Disney Parks and Resorts introduced the MagicBand in 2013. Worn on the wrist, the MagicBand serves as a guest’s room key, theme park ticket, access to FastPass+ selections, PhotoPass card and optional payment account all rolled into one. The MagicBand is integrated with MyMagic+, a web site and mobile app that allows guests to personalize their Disney experience.

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Increasing Bandwidth & Enhanced Networks
As the number of devices that exhibitor and attendees bring on site continues grow, convention centers continue to play catch-up. “The amount of bandwidth is growing exponentially — doubling every year,” said Mark Haley, president, Smart City Networks. “When it comes to bandwidth, density is the key. There should be no more than 40 users for each access point.”

In response, convention centers across the country are investing in infrastructure and networks upgrades. "When we..."
TECH TREK

started at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando eight years ago, there were 145 access points,” said Haley. “Now there are more than 1,000.”

Generating New Revenue Through Digital

Show organizers are finally generating a decent amount of new revenue from digital offerings. And industry suppliers continue to add new opportunities for sponsorships. For example, Digitell offers Syndicast, a product that can capture video conference content and stream it to multiple websites. “We worked with Practice Greenhealth to produce a live stream feed from the conference to exhibiting sponsors’ websites,” said Jim Parker, president, Digitell. Practice Greenhealth sold out eight sponsorship packages, which included Syndicast, for $25,000 each.

Other companies are making it easier to sell online sponsorships in real-time. For example, a2z Inc. has launched a product that will process sponsorship contracts and transactions online in real time. The software can be used to set up physical and non-physical assets. GES Interactive and Freeman’s PLANTOUR allow exhibitors to view on-site sponsorship opportunities at most of the major U.S. convention centers and get the specs to create them. Still others are hoping to help show organizers capitalize on the holy grail: e-commerce. In July, Balluun announced it will power Advanstar’s Shop the Floor, an online marketplace with e-commerce tools for exhibitors and attendees at MAGIC. “We will be adding more Advanstar shows in 2014,” said Peter Koch, CEO of Balluun.

Location-Based Services in Convention Centers are Becoming a Reality

Trade show organizers have been asking for affordable location-based services for several years, and some suppliers are now offering it. The current infrastructure in most convention centers does not allow for close-range tracking, but private networks and venue tech upgrades, such as those in the works at the Las Vegas Convention Center, are making it possible.

Freeman

In November, Freeman introduced enhancements to PLANTOUR, its web-based tool designed to simplify the event planning process and enhance the marketing of on-site sponsorship opportunities. PLANTOUR includes a new, responsive web design that improves the visual experience on all devices including tablets, PCs and smart phones, allowing users to identify and showcase sponsorship opportunities to potential customers anywhere, any time. The new enhancements allow show organizers to design and configure sponsorship opportunities including type, locations, price and availability, in real time. Freeman currently showcases more than 65 hotel and conference center venues throughout the U.S., and has the potential to double the number of venues in 2014, said William Collins, vice president of product development, Freeman. The new tool is part of the Freeman Technology Suite, which is free to Freeman customers. Contact William Collins at (214) 445-1000 or William.collins@freemanco.com

Experient

In December, Experient, a Maritz Travel Company, announced the launch of social media insight study services. Experient will collect, isolate and analyze social media conversations so show organizers can better understand attendees and their show experience through analysis of themes. The service will allow show organizers to identify attendee pain points and needs and respond in real-time. In addition, shows will be able to pinpoint detractors and influencers to attract and boost attendee registration and retention. “We can translate social conversations into strategic and competitive insights that will distinguish your trade show from the competition,” said Steve Werntz, director, strategic accounts. “Shows will be able to make informed business decisions based on experiential data, not just intuition and web analytics.” Reach Steve at (847) 996-5540 or steve.werntz@experient-inc.com

Ungerboeck Software Intl.

In February, Ungerboeck Software Intl. introduced Ungerboeck Showcase, an interactive event guide that’s available across all devices — PC, tablet or smartphone. It uses responsive design technology and features enhanced functionality, including predictive matchmaking, interactive floor plans, and sponsorship and advertising online sales. This tool allows organizers to handle their show’s content in a single system. Exhibitors, floor plans, agendas, documents and social media feeds are accessible to attendees, presenters, and exhibitors across all platforms. Show organizers can make updates and blast out announcements on their own. Analysis tools provide data to sales teams for up sell opportunities. Exhibitors can display products, market to attendees, upload videos and documents, and interact through social media.

Here’s a sampling of new technology products that have been introduced in recent months.

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In February, USI is launching Event Showcase, an interactive event guide that’s available across all devices — PC, tablet or smartphone. It uses responsive design technology and features enhanced functionality, including predictive matchmaking, interactive floor plans, and sponsorship and advertising online sales. This tool allows organizers to handle their show’s content in a single system. Exhibitors, floor plans, agendas, documents and social media feeds are accessible to attendees, presenters, and exhibitors across all platforms. Show organizers can make updates and blast out announcements on their own. Analysis tools provide data to sales teams for up sell opportunities. Exhibitors can display products, market to attendees, upload videos and documents, and interact through social media.

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Using Technology to be More Responsive to your Audience

As social media usage continues to soar, some companies are looking to help shows engage and respond to their social media communities. For example, Experient launched social media insight study services in December. Major corporate brands, such as Ford and BMW, have already been using this technology developed by Markit, its parent company, to gain insight into social conversations and make informed business decisions.

These companies spend a significant sum of money to have this data gathered and analyzed, which would be cost-prohibitive for most shows. “It’s new to our industry, but we’re working with corporate clients on this for 10 years,” said Steve Werntz, director, strategic accounts, Experient.

“Experient analyzed 46,000 social media mentions, which were grouped into 254 themes like programs, special events, brands, products, people, speakers, venues — to name a few.”

Reach Mark Haley at (702) 943-6000 or mhaley@smartcity.com; Steve Werntz at (847) 906-5540 or steve.werntz@experient-inc.com; Matt Kliekamp at (415) 548-0203 or mkliekamp@kpie.com; Peter Koch at (850) 570-3727 or peter.koch@ubaln.com; Jerry at (619) 679-3646 or jaeger@digitellinc.com

Global Experience Specialists (GES)

In December, GES introduced a few new features for Expresso, the company’s online management tool for exhibitors. Enhancements include event sponsor-ship opportunities, quotes for custom graphics and logistics, hotel reservation and ticketing. Using a single sign-on, exhibitors will access everything they need in one place and with one password. “We’ve designed Expresso to be quick and easy, like popular e-commerce websites, so our exhibitors have a hassle-free online experience,” said Steve Gebhart, vice president, digital product development and client solutions, GES.

GES also rolled out new enhancements for GES Connect, the company’s integrated, online planning tool for event organizers. Now with improved navigation, organizers can review and approve work orders, graphics and design transfer orders from one show to the next and set up customized sponsorship opportunities through the virtual venue tool. Sponsorship opportunities are automatically synced with Expresso.

In the First Quarter of 2014, GES is rolling out an exhibitor mobile app that will be integrated with Expresso. “On site, exhibitors will be able to request service, order last-minute items and complete an expedited checkout using the mobile app,” said Gebhart. Reach Steve Gebhart at (702) 515-9949 or SGBebhart@ges.com or steve.werntz@experient-inc.com

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Convention Data Services

In December, CDS introduced a new feature to its B2B Data Services. Attendees can use the Apple Passport app on their iPhone or iPad Touch to check in and register. CDS sends an e-mail registration confirmation to attendees who can add it to their Passport by tapping or clicking on it. On site, attendees can scan the pass on their device and check in by tapping or clicking on it. The pass includes time-based check-ins and a reminder can appear on the device based on the show’s start date. CDS plans to expand the program to include ticketed events and sessions. CDS rolled out the new feature at the American Society for Cell Biology ASCB Annual Meeting, which was held December 14-18 in New Orleans. The company will offer the product to all clients beginning in February. There’s a nominal cost, which is based on the total registration package.

Reach David Lawton at (508) 743-0153 or dlawton@cdoeg.com

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In November, a2z launched ChirpE 365, a native mobile app to extend the show’s brand by engaging audiences year-round. ChirpE 365 is designed to facilitate the syndication of an organizer’s complete suite of content. Supported on mobile devices powered by iOS and Android, ChirpE 365 also incorporates social media channels. “The fundamental difference between ChirpE 365 and other apps is that you don’t have to start from scratch each year,” said Rajiv Jain, CEO, a2z. The product includes analytics and metrics. The annual product license fee is $3,000, with a revenue share option.

a2z, Inc.

Balluun

In 2013, Balluun launched an e-commerce platform that facilitates commerce for attendees and exhibitors. Users conduct transactions from wireless-enabled devices, and the platform facilitates all sales digitally.

Last July, Advanstar announced it was partnering with Balluun to power its “Shop The Floor” offering for MAGIC. In October, the Toy Industry Association (TIA) announced it would use Balluun’s technology to expand the value and impact of participation in the American International Toy Fair.

“Our technology will make it possible for exhibitors and attendees to better discover new brands and products, automate, connect and enhance their business to drive more sales efficiency and day-to-day business anywhere and anytime,” said Peter Koch, CEO, Balluun.

Show organizers pay a licensing fee and share in the transaction revenue generated. Reach Peter at (650) 576-3727 or peterk@balluun.com.

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