The 2022 Partner Engagement Paradigm Shift

Convey Services eBook

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carolyn Bradfield, CEO Convey Services directs the strategy for its three divisions, Cloud Conventions, Convey Channel and InterAct Lifeline. A veteran of the conferencing and collaboration industry, Carolyn has founded and run organizations that have transformed the way that business clients connect to their remote teams, manage their clients, and use online tools to collaborate and connect virtually.

The Cloud Conventions division formed two years ago to utilize the sophisticated content management system developed for Convey Channel that was augmented to create a digital strategy for events, offer year-round engagement, and provide self-managed platforms for the small to medium sized business or customized, integrated platforms for the enterprise.

Paradigm Shifts

Paradigm shifts happen when there is a change in perception among a connected group of people in how things should be thought about, done, or made. A business paradigm shift can occur in a single organization or can be more systemic across industry groups or marketplaces.

Understanding what paradigms are shifting and how to react to shifts that are in progress or are pending can determine the long-term success of a business or the industry that it exists in.

The past two years have seen an accelerated environment of paradigm shifts in every business across every industry segment. We've moved our workforces to virtual offices, transformed the way we purchase products and services, rethought what could be delivered to our homes, and turned our video cameras on to participate in everything from doctor's appointments to business meetings.

Paradigm Shift Examples Driven by the Internet

- Order an Uber or Lyft online vs. hail a cab.
- Purchase a movie ticket, pick your seat and not wait in line.
- Check flight schedules and book tickets vs. use a travel agent.
- Have groceries delivered to your door vs. shop in the store.
- Purchase cars or homes online.
- Keep up with your friends with social media.
- Attend meetings, sales calls or conferences without leaving your home.

A Shift in Partner Engagement

For the last several years, we've seen articles and downloaded reports on "trends" in the ways we've needed to engage partners, many driven by the inability to stage a live conference or partner event. Industry experts are left to wonder if the changes brought on by the Pandemic are short-term, a new trend, or if there is there something deeper going on.

It is important to examine the difference in a "fad", a "trend" or a true "paradigm shift". Fads often are adopted at a feverish pace and then disappear just as quickly. Fads can also be thought of as 'how we do things.' right now.

Trends tend to solve issues around basic needs that are being met or delivered in a new way using the innovations of the time. The need to connect, interact and learn was being transformed during the Pandemic with the trend toward digital solutions.

A shift in paradigm is systemic and involves the need to make permanent changes in the way we see how we get business done, our interactions, and our strategies around community.

We have seen sweeping changes in partner engagement with technology leading the way to solve problems that seemed overwhelming in connecting our communities of stakeholders. And we've seen a knee-jerk reaction to treat technology as a fad once the ability to get back in a live setting became more viable.

Then, experts following the event industry in general started surveying audiences, exhibitors and event stakeholders to find that maybe the use of technology wasn't a disappearing fad, but rather a trend to expand audiences, offer options, and ensure that an event would launch no matter what.

But the deeper conversation is now centered around whether we are now seeing the beginning of a paradigm shift in the way we should be engaging partners. The shift is rethinking how partner communities are built, if events are constrained by time and location, and how those that fund the events achieve the best ROI.

What started as a short-term fad and evolved into a trend is now poised to shift the partner engagement paradigm at a highly-accelerated pace.

Shift

THE YEAR-ROUND EVENT CYCLE

"In many ways, events in a pre-pandemic world focused on the principle of "the bigger, the better." As the growing trend towards micro-events shows, however, sometimes less is more."
EventMB

For a long time, the prevailing paradigm in the channel marketplace has been to "stage" a tradeshow or event over a matter of days engaging in frantic activity to get the exhibit floor online and partners into hotels, the venue and to their workshops and social activities.

In the past two years events have now become smaller in attendance, more regional and more frequent vs. the large conference or tradeshow that happens only once a year. These changes not only represent new trends, but a real paradigm shift in short term vs. long term engagement strategies.

When the Pizza and Pasta Expo, held each year in Las Vegas for up to 25,000 participants was sidelined due to the Pandemic, the event team created Pizza Expo 365 for restauranteurs to come back monthly to engage with vendors, attend sessions and keep updated on the latest trends without the time and expense to leave the restaurant.

Having an orientation toward smaller, more frequent events coupled with longer engagement times to explore content or connect with providers creates an audience that is more connected, educated and involved.

Shift

Communities of Influencers

"When so much of the buyer's journey is done before talking to a vendor or salesperson—influencers play a critical role in building the story around your products and services.."
The ITA Group

Never has the 80/20 rule been truer than in the channel. Most providers should be able to point to the list of their "heavy hitters" who really get their value proposition, understand the ideal customer to sell to, and generate the balance of channel revenue. Go to a tradeshow and it's clear that others gravitate to those that are successful to learn their secrets.

If a "heavy hitter" could be turned into an influencer to motivate others to follow their pattern of success, then there is an opportunity to tilt the 80/20 rule to become more balanced.

Creating communities of influencers

- Change your digital content strategy to focus on case studies that highlight the success of your heavy hitter.
- Keep discussion forums active on your PRM or engagement platforms with scheduled times for influencers to be present and weigh in.
- Adjust your session strategy in virtual events to be weighted toward influencers as session leaders or panelists.
- Motivate the influencer to bring others along with them by creating financial incentives that reward them for the success of partners that they influence.

Shift

Digital Transformation

"Digital transformation is the process of exploiting digital technologies and supporting capabilities to create a robust new digital business model." – Gartner

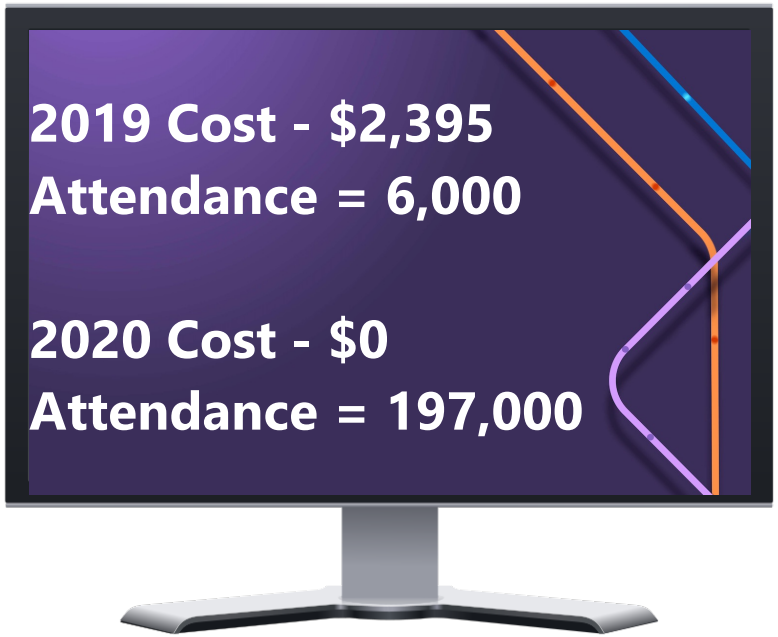
The channel event industry is in the middle of a digital transformation as it rethinks old operating models, experiments more, and becomes more agile in the ability to serve its stakeholders. The industry is integrating technology into all areas of how events function, fundamentally changing how they operate and how they deliver value to attendees, sponsors and the organization that owns them.

Consider digital transformation at all levels of an event experience:

- Use technology such as virtual reality to create immersive experiences creating a bridge between the physical and digital world.
- Create truly personalized environments using artificial intelligence (AI) and mixed reality.
- Create networked communities and keep them alive and active year-round.
- Close the knowledge gap about attendees with data from interactions on digital platforms to tailor marketing messages that reach current audiences or new ones that should be targeted.
- Create an event tech stack by integrating platforms together for a cohesive experience.

Shift

Marketing & PR Opportunities



Microsoft Ignite

One of the revenue streams for events has historically been from paid attendance allowing individuals to attend sessions and workshops or have the "all access" pass. However, in 2020 and beyond most events, especially if they were virtual, allowed attendees to participate at no charge.

Microsoft Ignite is an annual conference for developers and IT professionals that took place in venues around the world. In the past two years, the event pivoted to a virtual experience, changed their perspective on charging attendees and increased attendance from just under 6,000 to almost $200,000 when it became free to attend.

Finding strength and profit in numbers

The paradigm that attendee fees are a valuable revenue source is now shifting to one that recognizes revenue opportunities are greater by having a larger audience if barriers to participate disappear in an online environment.

Online events create opportunities for greater brand exposure, product placements and increased "eyeballs" much in the same way PR and marketing campaigns try to achieve. **The event paradigm shift is toward free attendance followed by marketing campaigns that generate revenue opportunities.**

Shift

Experience Over Attendance

"The virtual event audience is more value conscious now. They expect more—more interaction, more conversations, more entertainment, and, most of all, more variety and delight."
WBT Systems

Although content is still considered king, the shift toward providing memorable experiences is on the rise. Even before the Pandemic hit, events added those must-see special guests, music and experiences to keep attracting their audience.

Attend an annual event and you think you make valuable connections only to have them fade after then 2-3 day event ends. Finding ways to make connections more meaningful means providing more opportunities to stay connected over longer periods of time.

The experiences audiences really want:

1. People want direction, recommendations and experiences tailored to meet their individual needs.
2. People need to feel relevant and connected to a higher purposes or a cause.
3. People need to be heard by sharing their ideas, listening to others and tapping into the collective wisdom of the group.
4. Audiences want to engage in learning environments that are different and go beyond staring at a webinar screen.
5. People crave relationships developed over time in a digital world in the same way they use social media outlets today.

Shift

Tap into the Power of Data

"Data will be the key to helping us stay a step ahead of [the customer's] wants, needs, and intentions. And if we fail to harness data to understand them, someone else will take our audience from us".
Chris Cavanaugh, CFO at Freeman

The event industry has long relied on attendee registration and badge scans to provide insight on its audience; however, those elements are often static and don't really tell you what your participants are truly interested in.

In a digital environment, tracking clicks, how long a person remains in a session, the content they interact with, and what they view on the platform provides valuable insights into the audience and what they want in real time.

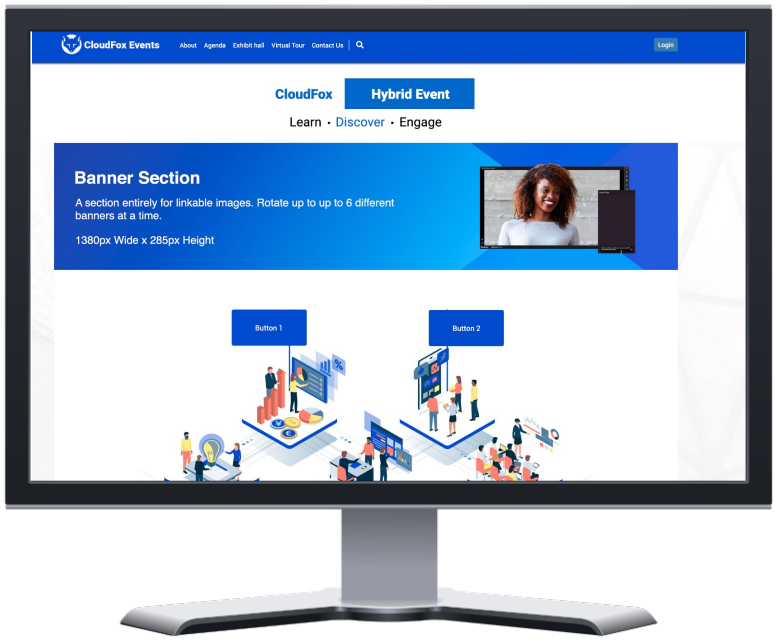
Ideas to unlock the power of data:

1. Use artificial intelligence to translate what people look at to make recommendations for sessions and content.
2. Collect demographics on site members or attendees and use technology to facilitate smart meetings.
3. Use matchmaking to connect attendees to each other based on their mutual interests.
4. Provide sponsors and exhibitors with real-time analytics to view who has interacted with their assets and what they viewed.
5. Deliver data from the digital platform to a marketing system for outreach campaigns based on interest.

Explore event data strategies

Shift

Subscribe and Manage



"Complex and expensive event technology management is fast becoming a thing of the past with a shift toward affordable, self-managed platforms purchased on a subscription basis."
Cloud Conventions

SaaS platforms have transformed how businesses operate with everything from Salesforce.com to manage prospects to MailChimp for email marketing. These platforms are purchased on a subscription basis, are self-managed and perform their business operations year-round.

Digital event and engagement platforms should be designed to serve the organization year-round, be easy to manage, and operate as a subscription program with different packages to fit the organization's budget. Platforms that stay live continuously promote extended engagement, allow for micro-events, and keep content available on demand.

Must haves in a digital engagement platform

Here are some key components of a digital platform:

- CRM system for data management
- Easy to use reporting
- Flexible branding tools for customization
- Video platform integration
- Session management
- Email messaging and marketing
- Content hosting and management
- Attendee application and automated onboarding

Takeaways

Remove barriers attendance to receive marketing & PR value

Think year-round digital engagement vs. a single event

Design events to focus on experiences vs. attendance

Utilize partner influencers to help others succeed.

Tap into the power of data to personalize the event experience.

Focus on digital transformation to expand the experience

Manage your own platform for the best value

Convey Channel

Convey Channel helps accelerate connections between providers and partners through its content and marketing network. Providers use Convey Channel's PRM technology to manage partner data, hold content and training assets, deliver marketing outreach and keep track of partner engagement.

Visit Convey Channel

Cloud Conventions

Unlike other platforms that are designed primarily for simple webinars or streamed single events, Cloud Conventions offers extended engagement to create a content-rich, interactive environment for attendees, a multi-faceted way to promote vendors and sponsors, and complete management for sessions, speakers and keynotes.

Visit Cloud Conventions