



Digital Marketing Strategies to Boost Institutional Growth & Congress Attendance

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Robin Lokerman is Group President of MCI. Based in Dubai, Robin has driven MCI's expansion outside of Europe since 2007. Under his leadership, the company has registered impressive growth in Asia-Pacific, India, the Americas and the Middle East & Africa and today serves a growing number of clients from 31 offices outside of Europe.

As a member of MCI's Executive Committee, Robin is jointly responsible for the leadership and strategic direction of an international group with a turnover of €280 million and offices in 60 cities and 31 countries around the world. He also leads the company's Institutional Division, serving association and government clients, and is responsible for strategic service development for these markets.

Day-to-day, Robin consults for associations on strategic planning, board assessment and global growth strategies, speaks at international business events and works with several leading industry organisations at the forefront of knowledge exchange.

Digital technology has a significant impact on the way we behave and interact on a personal level, but also on the ways we do business nowadays. In the event industry, while traditional methods of promoting congresses, meetings and incentives are still widely used, emerging digital technologies and practices have proven themselves as powerful tools to boost attendance and increase organisational growth. Robin Lokerman, Group President of MCI and Dean of the INCON University, gives his thoughts on the role and impact of contemporary digital marketing strategies to enhance event attendance.

Events and congresses, whether physical or virtual, are the main methods for an association to engage with new members and build relationships with existing audiences. The incorporation of digital strategies into your association's marketing plan is the preferred method for increasing your attendance. So far, most congresses, hosted globally spend less than 1% of the total event budget on marketing, however looking to the future, more and more international associations will be looking to enlarge their membership and programme attendance using digital marketing strategies.

At MCI, we follow closely the rapidly evolving digital climate. Almost all of our meetings and congresses across the world, employ innovative digital strategies that account not only for higher attendance, but also for substantial -and measurable- member engagement. We offer a wide range of digital services and products that are structured to optimise the client budget for achieving maximum reach. Recently, we used our digital expertise for the marketing of an international medical congress for a highly respected association that takes place every 4 years at a different location.

Using a full digital services package – website design, e-commerce, email marketing, SEO campaigns and social media, the outcomes of this congress were evaluated by our partners as highly successful, based on the following insights:

- More than 96,000 unique visitors to the website;
- 18 email marketing campaigns with average of 6,000 open emails per distribution;

- 2,500 new sign-ups to the association's database;
- More than 17,000 engaged with highly targeted ads that reached over 4 million views; and
- Social media exposure of regular posts leading to the congress not only built brand recognition but had more than 45,000 on the dominant social media platforms.

This resulted in a significant increase (6,000) of new conference attendees to the event as well as strengthened the awareness of the association's brand.

Essentially, social media forms the foundation of a successful all-around digital marketing campaign. Social networks have proven to increase not only media coverage and brand awareness, but also event attendance. High visibility on social media also creates sponsorship investments due to credibility. Apart from being an effective way to promote an event to a wider audience in a matter of seconds, it achieves so much more than traditional marketing methods at a significantly less cost. The effects of social media impact can be maximised by increasing engagement among brand followers and event attendees using clear messaging and multimedia assets (photos, videos, etc.), leading to higher reach.

In addition to the incorporation of social media in a successful congress management strategy, another way to boost attendance is the creation of engaging and impactful content around the proceedings - whether it be a press release, blog post, landing page or call to

action messaging. The more relevant your online content is, the more likely you will attract your targeted audience as the information will evoke their emotion leading to their anticipated attendance. This is another successful way of growing your database, creates a broader awareness of the congress and retain and nurture potential delegates.

Further you can also employ email marketing. This involves the regular dissemination of content-driven emails to increase engagement and account for your audience expansion. Tailoring content to your recipients gives your emails a more personal feel, as you avoid generic event invites and subject lines, thus increasing the possibility of potential stakeholders to sign-up. To that extent, it is crucial to not neglect the importance of list segmentation; categorising your contacts based on their role, buyer preferences and key demographic data as this is more likely to increase the open rates and will ensure that you are targeting the right audience.

In general, what is most important is to spend a considerable amount of time for planning your next congress with the right digital strategy. You need to implement your chosen digital tools and services well in advance of the event date, but also during and after in order to achieve optimal results.

To have a conversation on how digital marketing can grow your congress, contact Robin Lokerman at www.mci-group.com or robin.lokerman@mci-group.com.

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