



Tsukuba Forum goes virtual for the first time delivering exceptional audience satisfaction

Client profile

The Tsukuba Forum is Japan's largest event focused on technologies related to access networks. Hosted by NTT Access Service Systems Laboratories, it brings together more than 7,000 participants from enterprises and academia every year to share ideas with the aim of solving both social and business challenges.

Which technologies?

- Virtual Event Platform (3D Expert)

Which services?

- Digital Events project management
- Virtual event creation
- Multimedia event production

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I wasn't sure how well the online forum would be accepted, but in the end the number of registrants exceeded last year. We're very happy to have been able to hold the Tsukuba Forum again this year and introduce our technology to such a wide audience.

Jun Sawada, President and Chief Executive Officer, Member of the Board, NTT Group, keynote speaker for Tsukuba Forum

Summary

When the Tsukuba Forum 2020 was put at risk due to COVID-19, the organizing team switched the Forum from a physical to a virtual event. But they were concerned about participants' acceptance of and level of participation in the online version.

With good project management and planning, the Cloud Communications team created a flawless virtual event experience. Thanks to their Virtual Events platform, exhibitors could easily share innovations, while visitors could access and discuss the information provided. The incorporation of gamification tactics encouraged visitors to access the showcase and interact with exhibitors. In addition, online business cards ensured professionals were able to continue to interact after the event.

The virtual Tsukuba Forum attracted more attendees than previous physical versions, and got hugely positive feedback from its participants.

Business need

Delivering a major event, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic

The Tsukuba Forum is the leading global event for innovation in access networks. For the last 30 years, it's been where innovators connect, and ideas evolve. Cancelling the event due to the COVID-19 pandemic wasn't an option, so the team decided to provide a virtual event experience instead.

'There was a risk that we'd lose the opportunity to interact with key leaders in the access networks industry and, in turn, the opportunity to accelerate development of access networks technologies,' said Ikuko Takagi, part of the planning team. 'This wasn't an option given the trust and responsibility that the industry has in the event, so going virtual was the only choice.'

It was crucial that they were able to create a format that would satisfy an intense agenda, encourage expert exchange and fuel innovation, just like a physical event. As it was the first time the event – including keynotes, workshops, discussion forums and an exhibition hall – was taken online, concerns were high that participants may not accept the new format.

The Forum's organizing team needed a partner who could help deliver against their key objectives, understood the complex requirements, and could provide for a simple and interactive experience within a three-month timeframe.

'We have the knowledge to hold a physical event,' confirmed Akifumi Tanase, General Secretariat Tsukuba Forum 2020. 'But we didn't have a great deal of knowledge on how to create an online forum and get it ready in a hurry. Thankfully, we were able to trust in the Cloud Communications division of NTT to help us.'

Solution

Gamification as driver for interaction

The Tsukuba Forum took place on our virtual event platform as a two-day online event. The organizing teams from the Forum and NTT successfully transferred elements of the usual physical event within three months and managed to spark active participation and interaction among attendees.

'The Cloud Communications division was able to support and respond to us in a very short timeframe,' said Takagi.

The online format offered easy access for participants via a simple and secure online registration. Keynotes, workshops

and discussion groups delivered in virtual theaters provided plenty of possibilities for learning about and discussing innovations, as did 85 sponsor booths and 47 exhibitions from the laboratories. Colour coding helped participants orientate themselves in the various halls and gave additional visibility to the event sponsors.

Participation in workshops and visiting of the exhibition hall was further enhanced with gamification tactics in shape of a virtual 'stamp rally'.

'When we run the physical Forum, we encourage attendees to visit the various exhibits by organizing a stamp rally. At every booth a participant would collect a stamp and after collecting a certain number of stamps they would be awarded a prize,' explained Takagi. 'We applied this idea to the online platform.'

Each time an attendee visited a booth or a workshop they would receive a certain number of points. These were then applied to a leaderboard within the gamification section of the online platform. At the end of the event the participant with the most points was awarded a prize. The prize was physically sent to the winner after the virtual event.

'This event offered a unique virtual experience to its audience. It was charming to see that a digital experience can even bring a physical touch with the delivery of the prize to the winner,' concluded Takagi.

The use of virtual business cards ensured that contacts made during the event could continue conversations post-event. The V-card system lets attendees easily share business information within the virtual platform, ensuring a high level of engagement from the outset.

Active participation was further enhanced by giving attendees flexibility in consuming content. The event was hosted live and on-demand, letting participants effortlessly navigate between the different online spaces, and tailoring the experience to their individual needs.

Outcomes

High participation and popularity due to a simple and flexible event experience

Despite the initial concerns about participants' accepting the change in format and the level of interactions during the event, the virtual Tsukuba Forum was a complete success.

Higher reach

Participation rose from 7,100 attendees in 2019 to 8,800 attendees in 2020 (24% increase), with strong positive feedback from participants. The team also found that they reached a wider demographic, with attendees coming from more regions across Japan.

'It was the first time we've hosted an online event and without any knowledge about what to do, we had a lot to figure out,' said Tanase. 'I'm delighted that we received hugely positive feedback.'

Active participation

Thanks to the gamification approach, both presentations and exhibition halls were very well attended, with 2,600 of the 8,800 attendees taking part in the stamp rally. The keynotes were particularly popular with 5,000 people attending them. Participant survey showed that 99% was satisfied with the keynotes, and a vast majority of 86% of attendees rated their experience at exhibitions as positive.

A strong partnership

Working together with us as their trusted partner, the Tsukuba Forum organizing team were able to focus on delivering a high-quality event that connected innovators and met participants' expectations.

'By providing a platform with the support of the Cloud Communications team, we were able to realize a complete set of lectures, exhibits, chats and point rallies in a short period of time,' concluded Tanase.



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Akifumi Tanase, General Secretariat
Tsukuba Forum 2020