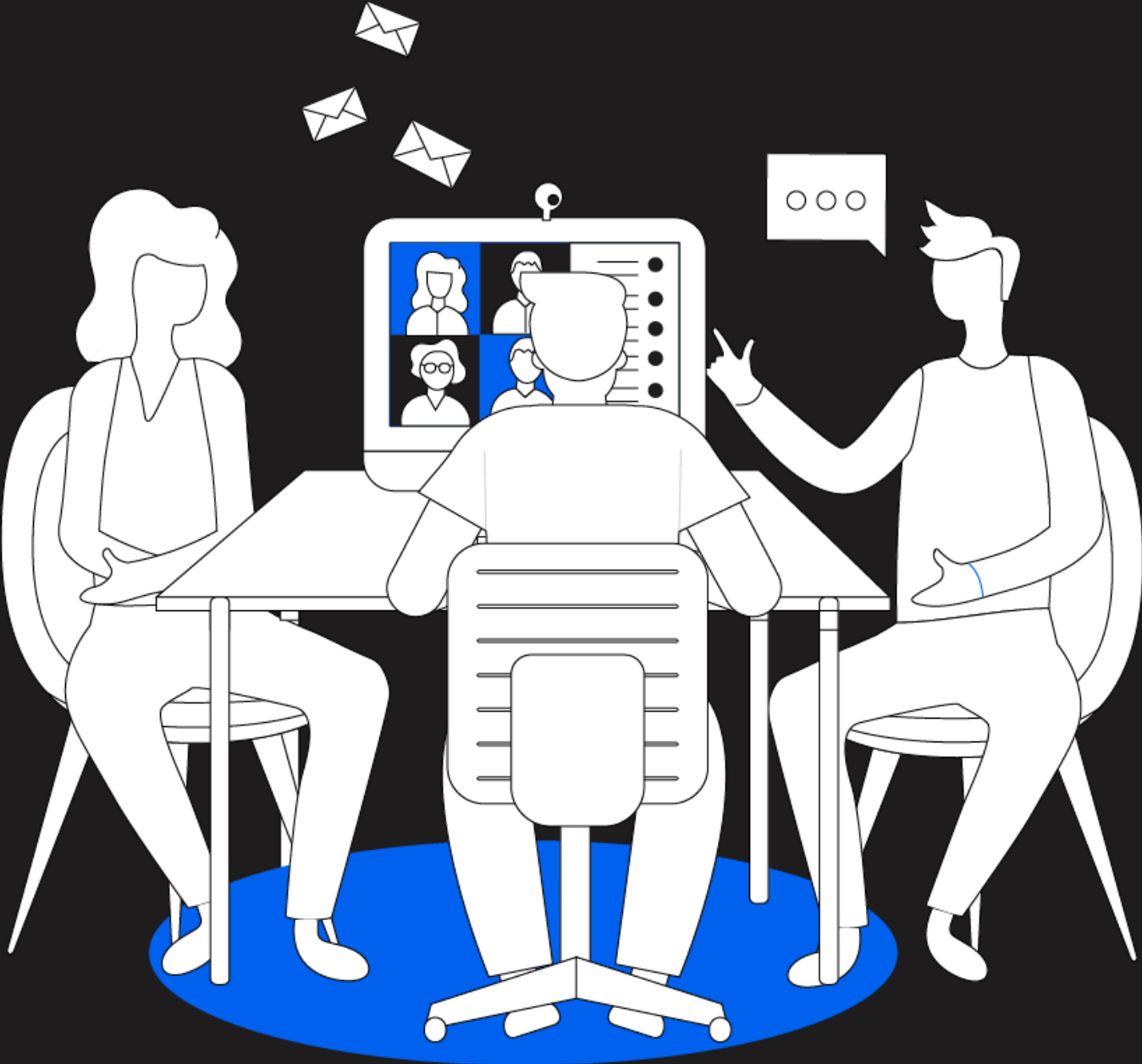


A Playbook to Cover Hybrid Conferences

AUGUST 2022



There was a time — just a few, brief years ago — that scientific conferences were held exclusively in person. Tens of thousands of people gathered in convention centers to attend sessions, review posters, be introduced to dazzling advances, and, perhaps most important, to network with each other.

Then the pandemic forced everything online. Now the tide is once again turning, but with a difference: By 2023 we anticipate that most major conferences will be hybrid, held both in person and streaming online. This new configuration means conference attendees need to rethink how they approach participation to maximize their investment of both time and money.

Key 2023 Scientific Conferences

CONFERENCE	DATE	LOCATION
ACC	Mar 4-6, 2023	New Orleans, LA
ANN	Apr 22-28, 2023	Boston, MA
DDW	May 6-9, 2023	Chicago, IL
AAI	May 11-15, 2023	Washington, DC
APA	May 20-24, 2023	San Francisco, CA
ASCO	Jun 2-6, 2023	Chicago, IL
EHA	Jun 8-11, 2023	Frankfurt, Germany
ADA	Jun 23-27, 2023	San Diego, CA
ESMO	Oct 20-24, 2023	Madrid, Spain
ASH	TBA	TBA

Anatomy of a scientific conference

A major scientific conference may feature as many as 6,000 presentations offered over three to seven days, in addition to poster presentations and conference display booths. Life science firms, device manufacturers, patient advocates and industry thought leaders present their latest drugs and research. Taken together, conferences present a vast wealth of information – and offer an amazing opportunity to discover a host of industry advancements in a concentrated timeframe. In tandem, life science firms have an unparalleled opportunity to engage with the key opinion leaders (KOLs) to generate insights and disseminate the latest scientific information. Yet the very wealth of opportunity that makes conferences so valuable also makes them challenging – it can be dizzying for attendees to determine where their time and attention is best directed.

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HCPs scurry from session to session, trying to choose the presentations that are most relevant to their area of expertise. Life science firm representatives are doing the same, with the added burden of coordinating with their colleagues to maximize the number of sessions they collectively attend. Now, with hybrid conferences, online attendees have the same issue, while perhaps feeling a step removed from the action.

Charting a conference strategy

Whether attending a scientific conference in person or virtually, attendees have three primary tasks: Identify the most relevant sessions; capture the information in those sessions; track additional questions, responses, and reactions to those sessions.

Life science firm representatives have two additional imperatives: to connect with as many opinion leaders as possible and to create a post-conference report with their key take-aways to circulate internally.

Today, much of this work is conducted manually.

Highly paid professionals with PhDs are shuffling through sheafs of paper, trying to chart the sessions that are most important to them. People attending virtually have 20 open tabs to “move” from presentation to presentation. Both are frustrated when session times are rescheduled, session rooms are reallocated, or other last-minute changes infuse havoc into carefully crafted conference strategies.

Some conferences have apps that help registrants navigate; but with each app being conference-specific, people have to download and learn a new system every time. And since every conference has its own template, every conference requires a different strategy. In addition, groups face a coordination challenge: Large life science firms may send hundreds of people to a conference. When they all attend the same sessions, it significantly lessens their collective impact.

Finally, participants record their experience by taking pictures, scribbling notes, and spending hours making reports to share with their colleagues. It’s not the most efficient or productive use of their time — especially when many of those tasks can be automated.

Let technology do the hardwork

There is an opportunity to let technology do the hard work, so that conference participants — whether KOLs, HCPs, life science representatives, or other interested parties — can focus on learning, exploring, and conversing. Using a shared online platform to select the most critical sessions — and to schedule who among a group will attend — can simplify planning.

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Leveraging artificial intelligence (AI), a platform such as Ferma.ai can identify the sessions that are relevant to someone's specific area of interest, and then within that broader area target the most important sessions for them personally.

Team leaders can assign sessions; shared calendars make it easy to follow up later with those who attended a different session. This scheduling information is applicable both for those attending in person and those online

Learn how Pfizer used Ferma.AI to cut costs by 50% and enabled teams to focus on higher-order thinking.

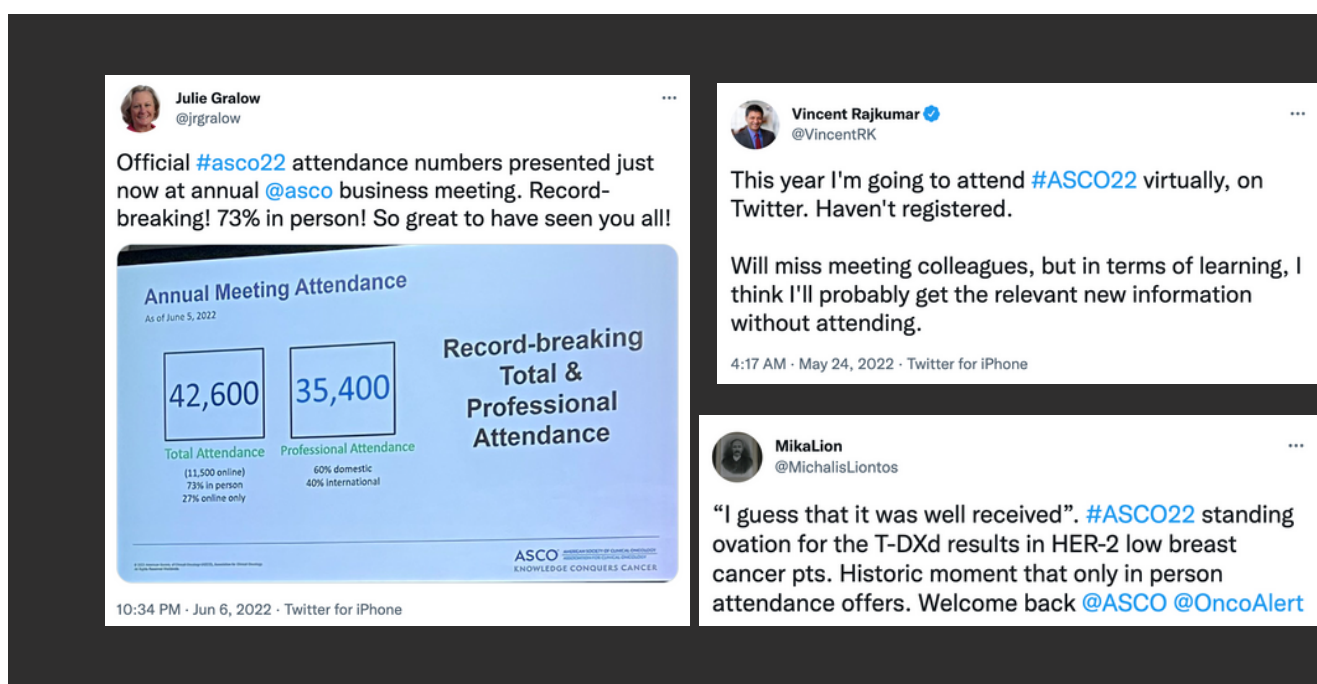
VIEW POSTER

Critically, the best platforms also supply all the conference content – including video, slides, presentation transcripts, social media commentary, even competitive intelligence (CI) – so people can access and share learnings in the format they prefer. Daily debriefs and post-conference CI reports eliminate the need for busy reps to compile their own briefs.

All this frees in-person conference goers to focus on networking without the stress of determining which session to attend, choosing between conflicting session schedules, and scrambling to take coherent notes. It also frees those attending virtually to connect with other conference attendees via social media.

Social media is the new conference lobby

In-person networking is pretty straightforward. Enterprising souls make a list of people they want to be certain to “run into.” Others let serendipity guide their encounters. But whether it is a quick chat inspired by a booth display, a conversation with the person sitting next to them at a plenary session, or a hallway discussion after a particularly stirring presentation, people who are co-located can find a way to talk. Online interaction takes more effort – but it is entirely possible thanks to social media.



Both those in person and those online should be keeping up with the steady stream of online commentary – most frequently on Twitter – during and after sessions. Audience members tweet questions; presenters tweet responses; everyone tweets about compelling ideas – and sometimes the ideas that fail to compel. This social media engagement also plays out across LinkedIn, Facebook, even TikTok.

Such public commentary presents a priceless opportunity for life science firms to engage with their targets, gaining meaningful insights from the entire online cadre, and generating awareness of their drugs.

It is a rare chance for two-way communication not only among the online attendees, but between online and in-person attendees. Yet, this is an opportunity few currently take advantage of.

In general, firms post on social media prior to a conference inviting people to come by their booth or attend their presentation, but they don't comment on other presentations, publish their data, answer questions, or otherwise engage with the audience during or after a conference. Yet, an HCP who happens to attend a session might post a picture of that company's data and be retweeted 50 or 80 times. It's a lost opportunity.

Just as social media engagement can help a KOL boost their personal profile, it can help life science firms create stronger ties with opinion leaders while the broader conference attendees gain more in-depth knowledge about topics that interest them.

Creating these connections can be a vital function for online attendees — and again, the right technology platform can simplify the task by centralising the online chatter around each presentation.

When attendance is critical, maximize the investment

Will hybrid conferences mean that companies no longer have to send representatives in person?

NO

If they have representatives on the ground, do companies need virtual representation as well?

YES

Hybrid conferences mean that life science firms and other large groups will need to have people attending in person and people attending virtually; both groups will need to have clear objectives and to be engaged in real time. Life science representatives particularly are interested in networking with prospective opinion leaders – but there is no guarantee that the HCPs themselves will find conference attendance the best use of their time. By having representatives in both spheres, companies can connect both in person and via social media. And by leveraging a comprehensive, AI-driven platform to organize their conference schedules and deliver their post-conference reports, they can maximize their time and their impact.

Interested in learning how
Ferma.AI can help maximize your
conference attendance?

Contact us.

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