



# The Digitalisation of Interconnectedness

## Communicating with members through technology

Written by:

Ori Lahav – Vice President Client & Operations - Kenes Group, Vice President - IAPCO

Jelmer van Ast - CEO & Founder - Conference Compass

It is truly amazing that the first iPhone was launched only 11 years ago. This started a revolution of data and communication we have never seen before. Not only in our personal lives, but also in the business sector. The use of smartphones turned us to the *always-on generation* with different expectations when it comes to flow of information. Communication strategies that worked before no longer cut it. This article will explore how technology can help associations, PCOs and other event industry experts to accommodate the always-on need.

Where not long ago, we have corresponded to association members through postal mail, landline phone and -- god forbid -- fax machine, this is no longer valid. When looking at today's associations, their members and event participants, the expectations when it comes to communication and content are different.

In the Ashfield research, *'The Science of Healthcare Professional Meetings'*, published in 2018, it was reported that 72% of Health Care professionals (HCP) expect congress materials to be available via a meeting portal or website during and after the event, with 54% of HCPs failing to find access to content or presentations.

Access is not enough; the expectations of the content has also changed. Members and delegates are looking for more customised substance that will be relevant to their needs. In *'The Future of Meetings & Events'* published by PCMA and Marriot in 2018, one of the main trends that was forecasted: *'emotional intelligence'* – “designing with the end-user in mind. As companies get smarter with predictive analytics, consumer expectations for personalized, seamless experiences will continue to rise. Meetings and events will need to move past reactive adjustments to adopt a proactive approach to personalized experiences, understanding the needs of participants before they arrive.”

Add to all of the above the FOMO effect – *Fear Of Missing Out* – that is typical with the younger generation and we need to rethink how we should communicate. Our new challenge is to ensure that access to information will be immediate and easily accessible from any device. And content should be customized to our users' needs.

### What does association communication look like today?

The communication of associations with their members has changed in the era of digitalisation. It had to. With an ever-rising number of communication tools,

people are exposed to information anytime, anywhere. Social media, messaging platforms, and collaborations tools are in a constant fight for the attention of the user. How can an association possibly cut through this noise?

In search of a solution, some associations turn to digital marketing techniques like personalisation. In their article *'How to get personalization right'*, *'AssociationsNow'* followed two organisations in 2019 that used personalisation to drive their conference attendance. How? Through leveraging existing member data (such as career stage or special interests) they were able to create a more personalised and relevant experience to (potential) attendees. These successes are no exception: In *'2019 Trends in Personalisation'*, *'Evergage'* found that 56% of marketers see an improved customer experience and 36% reported increased loyalty. Personalisation might be the secret key to cater association members' interests and be more relevant.

While personalisation can help you in your year-round communication, it gets more difficult during events. Meetings or conferences mark the peak to the overexposure of information. Event apps, matchmaking platforms, polling services, digital poster boards and more: while event organisers work hard

to offer attendees various technologies to enhance their event experience, they likely end up adding to a swarm of information. In times of data overload, associations need to find a way to make their communications work together, rather than having their own messages and offerings compete with one-another.

What is needed is a strategic approach, and we can already see societies making this move. Rather than spending on a one-off event app, organisations are now investing in a year-round association app, offering an all-in-one platform for their events, content and membership portal. It conveniently includes all well-known features of event apps, such as the event programme and networking functionalities, and in some cases also provides access to full-papers and webcasts. And with each new event, members will have access to a growing library of content and cross-event contacts, available to them anywhere and at any time.

### What will association communication look like in the future?

Looking towards the future, we can expect abundance of information to continue growing. Which raises the question: how can we facilitate the navigation between all the impulses?

And how can we filter out the relevant information? Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to solve this issue. By learning the preferences of the user, it can give recommendations, see trends and connect the dots to provide the right information, at the right moment.

We expect that the ways to consume this information will change too. Augmented reality will enable us to see information as a layer over what we are looking at, such as medical guidelines, schedules, wayfinding and profile information. This will only work when information is relevant, reliable and readily available. It may still take a few years for technology to mature and become widely available, but the direction is clear, and this future is inevitable.

*IAPCO represents today 135 companies comprised of over 9100 professional congress organisers, meeting planners and managers of international and national congresses, conventions and special events from 40 countries*



✉ [INFO@IAPCO.ORG](mailto:INFO@IAPCO.ORG)

🌐 [WWW.IAPCO.ORG](http://WWW.IAPCO.ORG)  
[WWW.CONFERENCECOMPASS.COM](http://WWW.CONFERENCECOMPASS.COM)