



Creating impressive higher education experiences
with the Cvent Attendee Hub®

288

attendees across two events

49

sessions across two events

139

research exhibitors managed

Washington University in St. Louis is a premier higher education institution located in St. Louis, Missouri. Like many organizations, Washington University needed to pivot their on-campus initiatives to a virtual environment due to the global health crisis.

Tammy Haney, Operations & Events Manager for the McKelvey School of Engineering, sought an all-in-one virtual platform to support key events hosted by the Graduate Student Services department. The annual PhD Visit Day typically attracts prospective PhD candidates, faculty, and staff onsite to share key research initiatives and facilitate networking opportunities for potential students. Researchers can also showcase their current projects through research presentations, also known as poster presentations. "These are very important events because this is our window to recruit top students for the school," Tammy explains.

Meeting Higher Education Expectations with Cvent Attendee Hub

Tammy knew the department would need dedicated technical support throughout the virtual event. She also wanted to use a robust registration tool that could integrate directly with the virtual platform for a seamless dataflow, as reporting would be key in evaluating candidates' interest and overall event success. Her team needed to target key audiences through integrated eMarketing solutions and wanted to include support resources within the platform for prospective students. They also needed to host over 50 different research presentations for current students and faculty within the virtual hub. Discussion and networking were usually a key part of the in-person experience, so creating avenues for virtual attendee engagement was vital.

Tammy's team decided to partner with Cvent to seamlessly manage the entirety of the virtual event using the Cvent Attendee Hub®. Coupled with the Event Management solution, the Attendee Hub offered Washington University the needed functionality to engage attendees, measure key data

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points, and provide valuable insights. With the industry changing so rapidly, Tammy says she felt secure with her decision based on Cvent's position as a trusted technology leader. "With the history of Cvent and the support, I knew immediately we had made the right decision," she explains.

Finding a True Partner to Drive Event Success

With less than a month from kickoff to execution, Tammy's team leveraged Cvent's Virtual Event 360 production services to help manage the rapid event build. The full event and registration site were live in just a matter of days. Tammy notes that her dedicated support team was integral to Washington University's success, especially in navigating the new frontier of virtual events. "We received an overwhelming amount of support right out of the gate from Cvent," she insists. "The live resources, in addition to all the online resources -- there's not a moment when I wasn't able to get immediate help through either of those avenues." The Cvent team was able to offer timely trainings for speakers and administrators in just three weeks.

The department could also target prospective students with integrated eMarketing functionality, allowing Tammy's team to view and manage invitees in real-time. In fact, they tracked an impressively high 81% average email open rate, indicating clear interest in the program from their prospective students.

Personalizing the Attendee Experience

The event ultimately included 117 attendees across 17 virtual sessions. The live collaborative sessions were streamed directly through the Cvent Video Conferencing tool with embedded Zoom functionality. This gave attendees the ability to view content with secure, one-click access in the hub. Within the session description, Tammy included session documentation and



profile information for all speakers. Attendees could browse all sessions and add specific sessions to their personalized agenda for a more custom experience. To promote session attendance, Tammy's team highlighted featured and upcoming sessions directly on the home page.

To encourage engagement with faculty and staff, her team also included live Q&A within the sessions. The staff could moderate these questions from the backend while attendees upvoted their favorites to keep the most pressing questions top-of-mind for presenters. It also gave attendees an avenue to engage with one another and discuss relevant research interests around the specific topics. These questions were available via reports after the event closed to help understand potential student interests and facilitate follow up.

Creating Opportunities for Engagement

As poster presentations are a staple of higher education institutions, Tammy's team needed a creative solution to help emulate the onsite experience where prospective students could directly engage in discussion with current researchers. They also needed a means of housing "posters" as PDF documents with relevant links for attendees.

The team decided to repurpose the existing "Exhibitor" tab to host research presentations with collaborative virtual booths. They featured 57 different presenters, all of whom could self-manage their tasks within the Exhibitor Management tool. Here, they could upload documents, manage their profile information, and track key milestones. On the front end, attendees could jump into collaborative virtual booths at will to enjoy interactive discussions with researchers. This centralized view ensured prospective students could find all the information they needed with ease. Tammy

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- Tammy Haney, Operations & Events Manager



explains, "There were booths where you could talk to the researcher, links to the researcher's lab, and any other information that particular researcher wanted to share, all in one area."

To ensure attendees had key resources at their disposal, Tammy's team repurposed the "Sponsors" tab to create a full campus support center with on-demand resources critical to student success. These included campus maps, financing information, library information, and more. To emulate the welcoming nature of the campus community, Tammy created a virtual "help desk" that would be open well in advance of the event. Interested attendees could quickly jump into the collaborative virtual environment to ask questions about the school, the event, or the virtual platform. It also helped ensure a smooth login and viewing experience for attendees on the first day of the event.

Tammy wanted to offer prospective PhD candidates the ability to have open conversations with current students and faculty. Onsite, her team usually operates a student dinner for networking. For the virtual experience, Tammy sent meal vouchers through a food delivery app so attendees could enjoy a virtual dinner while attending a panel discussion with current students. This created an engaging environment for the prospective students which helped mimic the in-person experience.

Impressing Stakeholders and Prospective Students through Virtual Events

Tammy says the seamless user experience for attendees was top of mind in evaluating the success of the event. She wanted the virtual platform to be easily navigable so attendees could effortlessly manage their schedule. The results, she says, speak for themselves. 97% of invitees logged into the virtual event, 77% of attendees joined virtual booths, and the Exhibitors

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page was viewed over 1,200 times across two days. She notes, "We didn't want them to be frustrated with the virtual platform. We wanted them to be able to come right in and know exactly where they needed to go, and I feel that we were able to achieve that with the Attendee Hub."

The ultimate metric of success for the event is converting prospective students to PhD candidates within the program. A key part of that is providing an engaging environment with opportunities for networking and information sharing. The Attendee Hub delivered in this respect for Tammy and her team. She particularly enjoyed the flexibility of the platform's customizable features like language management. "I absolutely loved the fact that we were able to change those identifiers and that there isn't a product limitation to that," she says.

It was an experience that impressed even the department chair as they look towards managing new initiatives with the Cvent platform. "Cvent is a complete solution," Tammy adds. "I don't have to worry about

integrations or a significant amount of failure. I feel the risk is mitigated because Cvent is an all-inclusive platform.” She even decided to leverage the Attendee Hub for a second PhD recruiting event just a few weeks later. As the event was for seven different departments, the complex registration process required multiple triggers and included 32 different collaborative sessions. She used the “Exhibitors” section to once again feature research for 82 different presenters. They also repurposed the featured exhibitor functionality to display the technical help desk so it was easily accessible for all 171 attendees.

Tammy’s advice for other higher education institutions is to persevere through any challenges with technology at the core of your event strategy. “Times change but research doesn’t stop. We need to find tools that suit our event goals and move forward with them,” she says. As Washington University continues to expand their offerings for virtual, hybrid, and in-person events, Tammy is excited about the potential she sees in their growing partnership with Cvent. She’s looking forward to leveraging new solutions like dedicated Appointments and OnArrival to help support the eventual return to in-person experiences. At the

same time, she has spearheaded an effort to expand the usage of the Attendee Hub across the department for several new events which under rapid development, including potential webinars, conferences, and so on. “I always go back to those I feel are industry leaders,” she says. “Trust is a major part of the decision. It’s as important as the product itself and the service that is offered. And all three of those are top notch with Cvent.”

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Cvent is the global meeting, event, travel, and hospitality technology leader.

Cvent provides easy-to-use, integrated technology solutions to maximize the impact of meetings and events of all sizes. We help organizations plan and market events, execute onsite, engage audiences, and measure and analyze results.

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