

Going VIRTUAL

Online trade shows can offer the same benefits as their conventional counterparts.

By Kenya McCullum

After the September 11th terrorist attacks, John M. Peckham III, Executive Director of Cyberconventions.com, thought about the fear of flying that many people experienced and created a solution for those in the real estate industry who did not want to travel to trade shows: a cyber convention that would replicate a hard floor event, but would allow attendees to participate through the convenience of their own computers. The result was the National Real Estate Online Convention and Exposition, which was first held in early 2002. The event was well-received – about 20,000 attendees participated in the five-day event, a turn out that surprised even organizer Peckham. Since that time, he has continued to manage this event, as well as assist other organizations with their own online conventions. These events can either be independent conventions or supplements that are added on to a traditional event.

But does organizing an online event lose something in the translation of the convention experience? Not at all, according to Peckham. When he surveyed his event's attendees to find out why they went to hard floor conventions, he found that they gave four

primary explanations – to listen to speakers, to visit exhibitor booths, to network, and to have fun.

Peckham said that an online convention can easily incorporate all of these elements – giving attendees the same dynamic experiences they are accustomed to having at traditional conventions.

THE BENEFITS OF ONLINE CONVENTIONS

Trade show managers can reap several benefits from online conventions – whether they are stand alone or add-on events. For stand alone events, a company or organization can expand its reach to more attendees than a hard floor convention would attract – sometimes ten to twenty times more – which is especially beneficial for international organizations. Attendees from all over the world can participate in these events at their convenience and the information and networking opportunities they seek are just a click away.

For an add-on event, a show organizer can attract attendees that were not able to travel to the hard floor event, while increasing the value for those that did. According to Peckham, this is a good supplement to the main event and in no way competes with it.