UPCEA Increased Engagement and Cut Costs at EDU Conferences with a Mobile App

How an event for higher education used technology to create an elevated experience

CHALLENGE

The UPCEA conference needed a new way to increase attendee engagement. Printed materials like brochures and pamphlets are a staple for most attendees because they like having something they can hold on to or mark up with notes.

SOLUTION

UPCEA aligned with Guidebook to develop an app that created more flexibility for their team and conference attendees. The UPCEA conference apps have real-time updates enabled through push notifications. And the app allows people to make their own schedule, engage with content, and find their way around with event maps.

RESULTS

Creating a mobile app was simple and it allowed UPCEA to reduce the amount of printed paper. On average, 80% of attendees download the app. Attendees with the app were engaged with presentations and took advantage of networking features to connect with speakers and other attendees.

Reducing paper and embracing a conference app

The UPCEA Annual Conference is the most significant assembly of thought leaders and practitioners today in the field of professional, continuing, and online education. Each year attendees join for engaging keynote speakers, high-energy concurrent sessions, and plentiful networking opportunities.

In addition to regular webinars, UPCEA hosts around four in-person conferences each year. For many years, they relied solely on printed materials to communicate with conference attendees. So, each individual held onto a schedule, additional pamphlets, and business cards too.

The team spent thousands to print. "Our old process of only using paper was too rigid," said Jacqueline Romero, Program Manager. "We wanted to have a digital, user-friendly, easy-for-staff-to-update tool that was an added benefit for attendees." So, in 2013, UPCEA decided it was time for a change and aligned with Guidebook to build an app that could be presented alongside printed programs.

Building apps for multiple conferences

The UPCEA team built different mobile apps for each conference location. So conferences in Orlando, Seattle, and Denver would each have a unique app with tailored content. Rather than creating these apps from scratch, to keep things simple, they usually clone features from previous conference apps, then edit the content to match the current event.

In 2022 the organization used one app for two conferences that were being held in the same location during the same week. To show which sessions were part of each conference, they used tracks and tags. This was necessary because some attendees were only attending one of the two events, but many attended both.

The tagging feature made it easy for UPCEA to consolidate communications into one place while still prioritizing the user experience by making it easy for attendees to find the right information with ease.

The ability to make admin changes through the app on a mobile device is one of the UPCEA team's favorite features. Attendees love the autonomy the app provides. Specifically how easy it is to sort through the schedule and build your own schedule.

Click the links below to learn more about some of the most loved features in the UPCEA conference app including:

- Sponsorship
- Custom list functionality
- Push notification
- Maps
- Schedule

Experiencing the benefits of a mobile application

The app serves speakers as well. They no longer have to print resources and can simply add a link to their supporting content in the 'resources' folder of the app.

"Speakers can upload their presentation slides and general helpful links after their session ends," said Amy Heitzman, Deputy CEO + Chief Learning Officer. "And attendees really appreciate being able to have access to this information when they get back home."

Guidebook forms and 3rd party extensions make it easy for speakers and UPCEA to create surveys that gather feedback from attendees. And individuals at the conference can help themselves autonomously.

They can find their way around using maps without having to ask event staff, though the staff is always happy to answer questions and offer help.

Many UPCEA members are part of the online education space, so they are eager for digital updates that enable simple processes for setting up the conference schedule and making changes.

At most events, about 80% of attendees download the app. But not everyone is eager to adopt the new tech. Some individuals without smartphones would rather use paper. So, for now, the team envisions an app that works alongside printed programs. They plan to continue using the conference app for all in-person events.