

MemberClicks Builds and Utilizes Virtual Event Platform to Host Online One-Day Conference

At a glance

<p>Organization name MemberClicks</p>	<p>Type Technology Provider</p>	<p>Solution(s) used ePly Virtual Venue</p>
<p>Industry</p>  <p>Associations and Chambers</p>		<p>Team Size</p>  <p>5</p>
<p>Challenge</p> <p>As the global pandemic continued to wreck havoc on in-person events, there was an opportunity to host a virtual event for association and chamber professionals and not only provide first-rate content, but also a blue print for hosting an online conference using a simple-yet-powerful virtual event platform.</p>		<p>Solution</p> <p>After a successful spring version of MC Thrive, MemberClicks engineered its own virtual event platform that it could pilot and then offer to clients and prospects. The event hosted nearly 600 live attendees and provided content to help association and chamber professionals prepare for what's next.</p>



Why did MemberClicks decide to do another MC Thrive in 2020? What was different with this fall version?

Smith: We had such a successful event with such positive feedback in the spring, we wanted to offer a similar program in the fall to offer education and thought leadership to our customers and industry. With that said, we also realized after MC Thrive in the spring, that we wanted to build a virtual event platform inspired by MC Thrive.

Now, introducing ePly Virtual Venue, which we hosted the fall event on. We were our first customers, which is exciting and scary at the same time. What was different? Not much, still an all-star speaker line up and encouragement and tips to keep moving onward and upward as 2020 has been an adventurous year.

How did we differentiate the tone of the fall MC Thrive from the spring version while maintaining the identity of the event? What was important in achieving the right feel?

Chen: It was important for us to take into account the journey that our audience has been on this year. In the spring, our focus was on how to bring insight and hope to those navigating a time of crisis and uncertainty. Months later, many of those same people are facing similar challenges, but more nuanced and varied - and with more fatigue.

We wanted to avoid dwelling on the overplayed aspects of the pandemic's effects, and focus more on forward motion, renewed energy, and creating opportunity. Visually, that lent itself to a literal path forward, integrated with the

laptop to show how technology can help us bridge some of those gaps.

What was the main goal/desired outcome of the fall MC Thrive?

Walker: In essence, our goals for both the spring and fall events were the same: we knew our clients and our industry were in need, and we provided thought leadership, connections, and technology to help. Specifically, this time around we wanted to continue to serve and connect with the audience we formed in the spring and to steward those relationships, educate them about our new virtual event product, and to drive more awareness for MemberClicks and ePly.

What was different about this MC Thrive?

Bottorff: The content in May was very much geared toward what would be helpful in that moment, whereas this time we wanted to give attendees practical presentations on how the lessons we've learned in the last 6 months can be applied moving forward.

Chen: It was a different challenge to plan and execute this event simultaneously with a new product launch, and to do them both justice. I also think there was a difference in the tone of the audience; people are worn down, virtual meetings and events are ubiquitous now, and the challenges they face are as serious as ever. I think it highlighted how great the need is for the content and solutions we offered.

How long did it take to plan, and what did planning look like?

Smith: There are a lot of moving pieces, important logistics, and small details that go into planning a successful event. Along with having a stand-up speaker lineup and engagement along the way, especially with Zoom fatigue and with a

day-long virtual event. You have to create energy! We started planning about 5 weeks out, but we did already have our strategy and game plan completed, so it was a matter of executing.

Chen: We collaborated to create an abstract for the event that would guide the direction of look and feel, tone, and content. From there, I shared a few potential concepts to the team, we settled on one after a few rounds of revisions, and I set out to create all of the assets necessary for promotion and the day of the event - graphics for email and social media, the landing page, set up of the event platform, and supporting collateral.

Bottorff: We kind of split duties with one person focusing on sourcing speakers and working with sponsors, another taking on prepping speakers and hosting. We also had someone run the branding and platform design, while another person was responsible for producing and building out the platform..

How did we generate the content and find speakers?

Smith: We knew going into the fall event that we wanted to switch up the content a bit and have topics focused on marketing, leadership, DEI, along with the tried-and-true topics like member engagement and non-dues revenue. Once we confirmed our preferred topics, we used our networks and relationships to find the ideal speakers.

How did we handle our commitment to sponsors, and why was this important?

Smith: Since we had to postpone our annual live event, MC LIVE!, we decided to offer complimentary sponsorship at MC Thrive to our MC LIVE! sponsors as a way to say thanks for sticking with us. Also, in working with speakers, we offered complimentary sponsorship for speaking at the event. We weren't

trying to collect sponsorship dollars to put on this event, but we did want to give our sponsors that added value and also show attendees what a virtual exhibit hall and what sponsorship value could be given to sponsors in a virtual environment.

Share about overcoming the challenges of producing an event of this nature and what lessons can be learned from your experience.

Bottorff: One thing we're all facing this year is the challenge of learning a ton of new technology. Between hosting, sponsoring, and attending events this year, I've probably used 30 new platforms and tools. That's why, when it comes to producing, it's important to dig into everything to 1) get a good idea of what you have to work with, and 2) can help your other stakeholders make the most of their experience.

If an organization wanted to execute a similar event, what would be your advice, especially when it comes to day-of success?

Walker: Test, test, test! Especially if this is your first time using a certain software solution. Test with your staff, speakers, and sponsors. Have a contingency plan. What will you do if a speaker's audio isn't working? What will you do if your internet goes out? Hopefully you won't need to resort to that plan, but just having it will give you more peace on the day of your event.

What was the biggest lesson you learned from doing this event twice in one year?

Chen: It's been a valuable exercise in walking our clients shoes and

experiencing the effects of this year alongside them, from beginning to end. It was also valuable to have done the event once before, so that we could identify what was worthwhile to continue doing, and what things we wouldn't miss if we skipped, to save ourselves time and sanity.

Walker: It's all about where you members are at that point in time. For us, people's wants, needs, and even headspaces were completely different in October than they were in April. To have a successful event, you HAVE to gauge the climate of your industry.

Smith: It takes a hardworking, dedicated and collaborative team to pull off an event. "Divide and conquer," as we like to say.

Bottorff: Attendee experience is paramount to a virtual event. Make it easy for attendees to understand how to access the event and participate during it.

What were the biggest successes of MC Thrive? Were there any surprising outcomes?

Chen: I think one of our biggest successes with this event was the number of registrations we were able to attract, and how much we grew that number from the first event. Even if not all attended live, they were interested enough to submit the form, and it seems like that affirms that we've tapped into their experience in a good way.

Smith: One surprising outcome was the success of the scavenger hunt where we strategically "hid" icons throughout the platform for people to find for a raffle prize entry. It was great to see the amount of attendees that engaged in this activity and the feedback they sent along with their answers.

Bottorff: As far as biggest successes, I think our varied types of presentations served us well. The keynote was different than what we've done in the past and

people raved; Jason Ebey presented differently than normal, and we felt ALL his energy; The “All Things Membership” and “Association Law” presentations were great conversations that were engaging enough that they didn’t need supporting slides. Plus, who doesn’t love a little game of virtual Jeopardy!?

What does the future of MC Thrive look like to you, and what are you most looking forward to for future MC Thrive events?

Smith: Events are fun and they are a great way to engage with our customers, industry and thought leaders. Attendees drive the interest for us continuing to host events like MC Thrive and survey feedback is important for our future plans.

► Read more at blog.memberclicks.com/case-studies

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The post-event survey revealed that 97% of attendees were very likely to attend another MemberClicks event; 91% said the content was very helpful; and 97% said the speakers were very knowledgeable.

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I see MC Thrive being on the forefront of events like this; being the event where attendees see things they've never seen done before.

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With MC Thrive in particular, we knew we needed to try to somehow replicate that on-site energy in order to show that virtual is just as valuable.

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at the MC Thrive platform

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