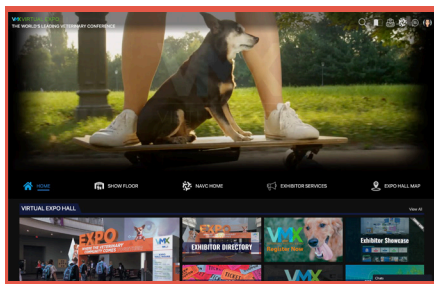


## North American Veterinary Community raises the bar for conventions during pandemic. Here's how.



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### NEWS

**Continuing education always is a critical part of the North American Veterinary Community's annual trade show, but there's no doubt the Covid-19 pandemic has made those types of meetings difficult.**

**T**hat's why the Orlando-based veterinary professional development nonprofit has been pushing outside the typical realm of trade show and conference practices to adopt virtual aspects to bring veterinary professionals as many options and avenues possible for them to learn about the latest techniques, studies and products in the industry.

In fact, its upcoming Veterinary Meeting & Expo (VMX) 2021 at the Orange County Convention Center from January 16-20 is paving a new road for hybrid physical/virtual events that may be a blueprint for many other shows in the future.

"We are excited to open registration for VMX 2021 and to expand the reach of the world's premier veterinary event by making it digitally accessible for the first time to more people around the globe, including those who, in the past, might not have been able to attend VMX," said North American Veterinary Community CEO Gene O'Neill in a prepared statement. "Through our new [VMX Virtual] digital platform, veterinary professionals anywhere can learn from and engage with the world's most renowned veterinary professionals, explore our industry-leading expo hall and network with colleagues wherever they are most comfortable — at home or live from Orlando at the convention center."

"The upcoming event will provide various continuing education credit hour lessons live and virtually. Many of the sessions also will be available for 90 days after the live event to help attendees — both in person and virtual — fit lessons around their busy schedules. In addition, some sessions may be offered for foreign veterinarians who don't speak English.

These new offerings join a virtual expo hall that VMX launched with its 2020 event — held earlier this year — that allowed attendees to navigate 3-D exhibitor booths chock full of information, products, services and contacts.

"One of our biggest features at our conference is our exhibit hall. We have roughly 750 exhibitors showing up on any given year. We take about [250,000] square feet of space and we saw there were a lot of missed opportunities for some attendees to really hit every booth in the exhibit hall. So we started talking about how can we deliver this to them online where they have access to it — 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Not only does it benefit the attendee, but also the exhibitors as well," O'Neill told Orlando Business Journal.

The platform was developed by Oviedo-based Simulocity LLC, with the North American Veterinary Community being the first to license the product — which later was used again for a job fair held in June.

The adoption of virtual components have helped the North American Veterinary Community extend its reach to new parts of the globe. Professionals in various countries who couldn't attend in person now will be able to do so virtually. "We think this will be a big hit for us, both from extending our footprint globally and reaching out to a different market, as well as complementing our live event," O'Neill said.

The organization is holding virtual events at just the right time, based on industry activity. Event planners are challenged to find new ways to sell tickets and generate the necessary revenue to make events profitable. The world of Covid-19 has caused most corporate travel to be grounded, and thus virtual events have opened the door for an ancillary revenue stream.

More than 68% of meetings professionals say at least half of their events now are hybrid or online only, according to Northstar Meetings Groups survey of more than 1,100 professionals. In addition, more than 75% of meetings professionals said they will require virtual event platforms when planning their meetings.

Most notably, feedback included in the survey said virtual events can be "just as effective and far more efficient," depending on the events' goals. Adopting virtual meetings is not going to be just an option for long — it will become expected, said experts.

"Virtual events are here to stay," Les Goldberg, CEO and president of video, audio, lighting and media meetings and broadcast solutions firm LMG Inc., told OBJ. "They are going to be another channel we use to communicate. With airlines and people not able to fly, we deal with the idea that people have the apparent need to join and communicate, so we won't see live meetings go away."

Meanwhile, O'Neill equated associations and events that aren't embracing virtual options to Blockbuster Video, the former video rental empire that got dominated by on-demand video and mail-order services like Netflix. "From the exhibitor standpoint, the virtual piece as it is was sold as a 'nice to have' to complement your in-person booth, but it quickly has become a must-have. If you are not in that space, then you are not taking advantage of what the other exhibitors are taking advantage of 365 days of the year."