



VIRTUAL EXPEDITION

Gliding into uncharted
territories for better science

WHITE PAPER

The Expedition Map

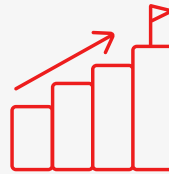


Engine
starts

COVID-19 as a
catalyst

The first
adventure

AAT-AD/PD™



Model
creation

Content &
interactivity

The future

And lessons
learned





INTRODUCTION

Medical and scientific meetings came to a sudden halt when the COVID-19 pandemic took hold of the world. At first, it seemed that it will affect only certain continents when, at Kenes Group, we already started coming up with solutions for those delegates who could not travel. Yet, the pace intensified quickly, and many events had to make momentary decisions on how to remain viable, serve their communities, and deliver the education that they have been planning for.

We went through this wave too - we had an event take place in a safe city, only to have the same place under lockdown a couple of weeks later. We had to make decisions for several events, as during this time of the year the high season for conferences naturally picks up. We kept cancellations at a minimum, postponed most events, but there was one event in particular that we took a leap of faith to turn into virtual, with less than three weeks lead time - the 2nd AAT-AD/PD™ Focus Meeting 2020.

This event has now given us a new kind of freedom, adding a new dimension for us to create in. With some of our postponed events coming in the next few months when travel will clearly not be restored, especially for medical doctors, we are turning more and more meetings to fully virtual experiences.




This white paper explores the expedition into this uncharted territory - that of the virtual conference.



THE THREE-WEEK ADVENTURE

AAT-AD/PD™ Focus
Meeting 2020






The technology for virtual events has been available for at least a decade. However, our human nature and will to meet, travel, and explore has always been stronger than substituting such valuable experiences offered at a conference with more screen time. There have been also traditionalists, who have opposed the use of various tech tools that could expand the life and audience of a meeting, slowing its adaptation in the events world.

The catalyst for this sharp turn to technology - an unprecedented global pandemic - helped us fully dive into these virtual solutions to answer the need at hand.

The Kenes Group IT team had a built arsenal of solutions at their fingertips, used for creating hybrid events, online learning, and virtual exhibitions prior to COVID-19. This fact was a tremendous advantage with less than three weeks of lead time to convert the AAT-AD/PD™ Focus Meeting 2020 to a fully virtual experience.



THE MODEL

It is all about content and interactivity.



MISSION OBJECTIVE

It is not about purchasing a virtual platform, which would be similar to hiring the venue for live events. It is all about science and designing the (virtual) experiences.



The AAT-AD/PD™ Focus Meeting model was to keep the scientific programme as much as possible as it was announced, and the goal was to reinvent and digitalise the experience. The scientific content is of primary importance to the Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease community with new revolutionary research about to be revealed. That meant pre-recording 250 sessions, which would be released on the first day of the event to view on-demand. It also meant that the ePosters had to be highlighted and an open discussion with their authors created.

Interactivity was essential, as one of the top reasons for participants to attend events is in fact networking and the possibility to discuss the presented content with other delegates. The opportunity to meet some lecturers had to pivot too, adding a new dimension to the conference with fresh content streamed daily.

And last but certainly not least – giving sponsors and exhibitors the possibility to showcase their latest products and interact with delegates freely and effectively.



MISSION OBJECTIVE

To keep registration fees the same, make sure the experience is designed accordingly for all stakeholders. Work closely with sponsors and make sure the goals of all parties still align. Provide them with value for their support.



Business Model

When turning to virtual, the first question that comes to mind is the pricing of the event – if it has to be free, with a lower rate than the live event, or can the same registration fees be kept?

Together with the executive organisers, our answer to this question was simple – the value remains, so do the fees. We worked to ensure that the scientific programme of AAT-AD/PD™ Focus Meeting will remain unchanged, and for that, we promised all registered participants that they will receive the same event in a different format. That meant that the fees will not change for future registrations either. And new ones did come in hundreds. Moreover, once the event days were over, the whole experience remained online for another three months, open for anyone who had changed their mind. Indeed, more delegates registered for the late experience too.

Another part of the business model is to align with the event sponsors and provide companies with the same, or even more, opportunities for exposure. The online world gives plenty of possibilities, including better tracking and reporting on the activity each booth generates. Sponsors and exhibitors can build their digital booths with their own branding, logos, messaging, and attendees can connect with them in real-time over chat, video, or email and request information. Moreover, sponsored symposia proved to be better attended than the same during previous AAT-AD/PD™ Focus Meetings.



MISSION OBJECTIVE

Think of the right combination of tools in order to effectively reuse the content in the future, creating additional revenue streams.



Tech Model

There are many available platforms out there. In technical terms, the virtual model offers a couple of added benefits. All the captured content can be repurposed in different ways. Having the different segments added to ePortal libraries or leaving the event available for registration for another few months, opens additional revenue streams to associations and event owners to gain from the verified and peer-reviewed content of their conference. The future where on-demand is a norm is already here.






MISSION OBJECTIVE

Combine educational methods in order to achieve an interactive and engaging experience for delegates.




Learning & Education



When it comes to effective education, virtual is going to evolve a lot in the foreseeable future. Yet, as this is not completely new, we already know that different formats for learning have to be used, just as it is with live meetings.

Interactivity, changing the pace, combining reading materials with narrative, quizzes, and more, are just a part of what effective virtual meetings can and will offer. Combining these different learning methods can also help doctors gain the CME/CPD accreditation whenever and however they choose to.



MISSION OBJECTIVE

It is all about aligning the expectations of all stakeholders. Marketing and social media remain the best outlets to handle this part of the expedition and ensure effective and timely communication.



Managing Expectations

For one event to be successful, two factors are key – having the support of sponsors and the trust of delegates.

With the AAT-AD/PD™ Focus Meeting, some uncertainty could be felt once the announcement on pivoting to virtual was made, which was only natural. While this was not the first edition of the event, this was the first virtual conference that many delegates would experience, and they could just guess what to expect. The same is true for supporting companies, not too certain how they will be able to replicate the experience from a live meeting.

This is the time for marketing to shine and align everyone's expectations. To do so, a walk-through video, presenting the platform, and easing all stakeholders on the experience was the key, ensuring that the technicalities are easy to handle, and the experience will be after all a familiar one.


Communication and instant feedback through social media become a natural extension to any live or virtual meeting. More so for virtual, as there is no other way to hear the thoughts and suggestions of participants and companies, their likes and dislikes. With an established hashtag, this is a smooth and straight-forward experience.



THE FUTURE

What does it hold?





For Kenes Group, the AAT-AD/PD™ Focus Meeting helped us gain valuable knowledge on what worked and what could have been better. What delegates and sponsors appreciated and where they needed a little bit more of.

At the end of the day, knowing the intricacies of the medical and scientific conference is what is needed to create an outstanding meeting, be it live or virtual. A proven fact is that the professional conference team at Kenes Group is made of some of the most flexible, innovative, and creative people, always ready to overcome unprecedented situations.

That is why we trust that for the future, we will keep some of the good lessons of this whole experience:

SCIENCE IS THE HERO

Once the crisis hit, we went back to our core values and mission - empowering knowledge. In this situation medical education and scientific progress, sharing research and innovations in various scientific fields, have been of utmost importance to unlocking the world from the grip of COVID-19. In the future, science will continue to drive conferences and events, with each piece of information carefully allocated to its best medium - be it live or virtual.

RESILIENT

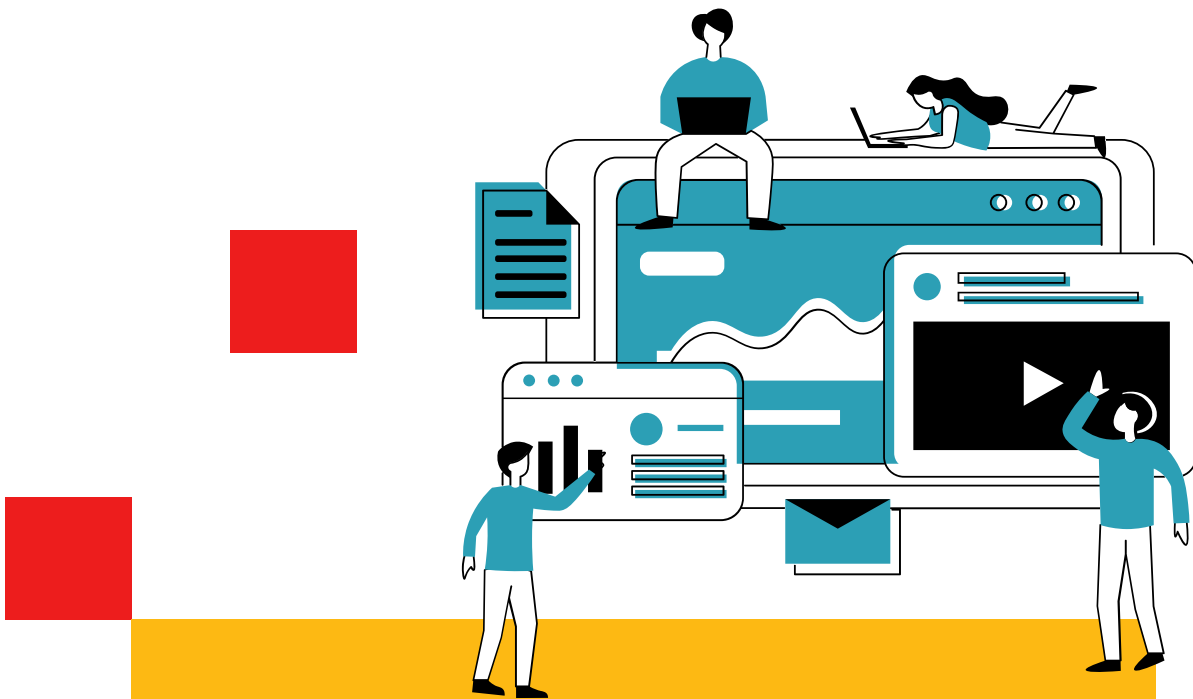
We have always been a very strong industry, coming together and working toward solutions for the whole. This crisis made our bond even stronger, with industry associations, suppliers, destinations, venues, conventions bureaus, and more, joining forces to overcome the challenge. We believe that this will remain an added benefit for the future, creating effective and efficient chains and processes to deliver the best outcomes.

HYBRID

Now that all stakeholders have experience with virtual meetings, the ease of attending them from the comfort of one's home, will remain in demand. When a delegate cannot travel, or is not available on the given dates, offering a hybrid option, or late registration to view on-demand will continue.

SUSTAINABLE

The positive effects on the environment from this pandemic have made us all enjoy fresher air and admire how our surroundings thrived. The impact of events on the environment will be criticized and event planners have to plan for that. A new kind of delegates can also appear - the greenies - those that want to participate but are more conscious to hop on a plane and put pressure onto foreign environments. Accommodating them will involve the use of now-familiar technologies, and for the rest onsite - more conscious planning will become the norm.



BEYOND MEETINGS

Are we going to shake hands or hug once we meet again? Maybe. To be able to travel may become a clear testament to one's health status. With the slow release of measures, it will keep us conscious of this period for a long time and that is certain. Some societal norms may change permanently. Yet, at the end of the day, we are social creatures and need to be in contact with other human beings. We need to exchange knowledge through conferences and events, as we have done for hundreds of thousands of years. We need to explore, travel, see with our own eyes, and this will remain. Expect a different type of conference. At Kenes Group we are already creating it.

Put your congress at the hands of the experts.





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