

Smart meetings

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Tech Two-Step

ASAE and Nashville connect attendees with cutting-edge products

By Holly Woolard

Nashville proved to be an ideal destination to showcase the latest, greatest event-technology tools during the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) Annual Meeting & Exposition Aug. 9-11.

Recently ranked No. 10 in the United States for Best Cities for Tech Jobs by *Forbes* magazine, Nashville offers free Wi-Fi in its main tourism corridor and a free charging station at the Visitor Information Center. The city even has a technology council.

Holding ASAE at the **Music City Center**, which opened in 2013, was another tech coup. The center's fiber-optic backbone supports the most demanding event requirements, including elements such as basic Internet access and large broadband Ethernet circuits. The onsite professional technical staff helps coordinate telecommunication needs in advance and during events.

Inside the convention center's 353,143-square-foot exhibit hall, rows of tech companies, hotels and destinations were armed and ready at their booths to share news about their tech products. There were three rows of tech companies vying for attendees' attention.

Omni Event App

Omni Hotels & Resorts, which has nearly doubled in size revenue-wise over the past year due to the addition of nine hotels, was onsite to talk about its new

event app. Omni partnered with **Encore, a Freeman Company**, to create a free app, **OmniLink**, for meeting professionals and attendees holding events at the brand's 60 properties.

Very user-friendly, the app features sections for facilities, agendas, logistics links, attendee bios, sponsors and news. Since the app's launch in May, more than 300 groups have used the tool.

"We were looking for ways to partner with our guests and clients," says Tom Faust, vice president of sales for Omni. "We provide this to meeting planners for no charge. We felt this is a way to differentiate ourselves."

Other tech companies at the ASAE expo included **Cetrom Information Technology, Inc.**, an industry leader for custom cloud solutions, which helps transform the way associations and nonprofits succeed. Christopher Stark, president and CEO, says, "The cloud can be the key to successfully executing missions and supporting members. However, when implemented improperly, it can be the downfall of an organization. Finding a technology partner that your association can trust is vital to future success."

(C) Systems Global and **etouches** shared a booth to promote the benefits of their products, which can be integrated with iMIS, the popular membership engagement software for associations and nonprofits. Steve MacKenzie, vice president of sales for etouches, says the one-two punch that his company and (C) Systems delivers helps "the event piece talk to the association piece." This includes e-marketing, registration, RFPs, budgeting and social media.

Education Sessions

Besides suppliers, ASAE featured daily learning labs, many of which focused on technology. The education session entitled "30 Ideas to Innovate the Workplace" discussed current business models, technology, training and marketing designed to transform the way organizations do business.

"Tweet Like a Pro" was geared toward beginners, but also served as a brush-up course for Twitter veterans. Tips included shortcuts for following friends and events, how to create professional profiles, and ways to help users become more comfortable and confident.

"Create Your Digital Strategy" reinforced the importance of making sure websites, blogs and social media are an extension of an organization's overall mission. "There needs to be a process for reviewing which new tech trends will benefit your organization," said Martin Davies, an e-learning specialist.

Fundraising App

The **ASAE Foundation** had its own app that tracked how many miles attendees walked during the convention. The foundation was able to turn the app into a fundraiser with the help of Choose Chicago, which donated \$25 for every mile logged by those who downloaded the app.

It was easy to rack up the miles by strolling up and down the rows of exhibition booths. Nashville's very walkable downtown, packed with restaurants and honky tonks, also proved popular with attendees on foot. ASAE and Nashville made a great duo, pairing up for an informative tech two-step.



Tom Faust, vice president of sales for Omni Hotels & Resorts, and Leslie Stilwell, corporate manager for training and events, use the brand's new event app.