ONE TEAM

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IT WORK

Optimise 2020

A Blueprint for Virtual IT Events in 2021

//eacs

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Introduction

eacs' annual Optimise IT event is the largest independent IT conference and vendor showcase event in the UK focused on the mid-market. For over 20 years it has attracted industry leaders and technology shapers, providing them with a platform to network directly with key decision-makers who are looking for ways to deliver their IT Strategy more efficiently and effectively.

In this paper, we will look at how we overcame the COVID-19 pandemic and a national lockdown to create an online event that could provide attendees with the same experience of a normal Optimise event all from the comfort of their homes.

The Challenge

At the start of the year, the event was scheduled to be held in June at Silverstone racing circuit. When additional COVID-19 restrictions were put in place in March, Optimise IT 2020 was thrown into doubt. After discussions with Silverstone, an agreement was reached to rearrange the event for November, with both parties still harbouring a strong desire to hold it as a physical event. This was principally down to the success of the format of previous events, where feedback from attendees highlighted the value of face-to-face contact with their peers, as well as being able to interact with a variety of experts from the **eacs** partner eco-system.

However, with national restrictions only starting to be lifted in the summer, as well as the fact that social distancing measures were predicted to be in place long into 2021, it was clear that an in-person event was highly unlikely. This meant that **eacs** needed to think outside the box and consider how they could replicate the size, feel and atmosphere on an event that has become a mainstay in the calendars of IT industry leaders for over 20 years.

Kevin Timms, Chairman and CEO at **eacs**, explained: "COVID has had a truly cathartic impact, dramatically altering the way businesses operate, how they make decisions and how people work. With less than 50% of the UK workforce now back in the traditional office environment, coupled with the continued outbreaks of COVID, we knew that it would be very difficult to keep Optimise as an in-person event this year. The feedback we have had historically is that delegates really value the opportunity to review their IT Strategy and be able to address their challenges directly to **eacs** experts as well as the diverse number of partners **eacs** brings together under one roof in one day."

Kevin added: "Therefore, we needed a solution that could help us replicate not only the feel of previous events, but also provide delegates with the same degree of autonomy to select topics and areas that were of particular interest to them – all from the comfort of their homes or wherever they may be working and operating from."

The Solution

Despite the challenges of recent months and the risks presented by COVID-19, **eacs** were determined to make Optimise happen. **eacs** decided to take the annual conference virtual, creating an online event spread over three days. The event consisted of four Key Note speeches from the likes of Microsoft and Sophos, as well as over 30 innovative webinars. In addition, delegates had the opportunity to attend various Q&A sessions with some of the greatest minds in IT and also pre-book 1-2-1 technical sessions with experts, all of whom were on-hand to help them solve some of the most pressing IT challenges facing businesses today. The decision was taken to split the event into 4

distinct themes: Cyber Security, Hybrid Cloud, Modern Workplace and Digital Transformation – all of which had been highlighted as being areas of concern by their clients and prospects.

Key to ensuring the success of a virtual Optimise IT event was choosing the right platform. Having looked at various options, **eacs** selected 6Connex – the leading provider of secure virtual event solutions. The final event solution enabled **eacs** to retain the look and feel of a physical event, whilst at the same time ensuring that attendees could access a huge variety of live and on-demand business critical technology webinars from some **eacs** most trusted partners, all from the comfort of their home or office.

An added bonus for our delegates was the ability for them to access all of the webinars as soon as they finished, meaning they wouldn't have to make the difficult decision of choosing what to attend. Even after the event, any registered delegate could access every KeyNote, every webinar and download every piece of collateral on-demand via the registration portal for a year. **eacs** has found that some 2TB of key technical information aimed at helping business come to terms with the new way of working has been uploaded and made available through the virtual platform for attendees to access.

In addition, factored into the virtual solution was the opportunity for delegates to talk directly to a host of technical experts via a virtual "Genius Bar", where they could get advice on how to overcome critical challenges relating to COVID-19 and into the next few years.

"The event has been really good. I have seen some excellent webinars and chatted with some vendors. I even met another delegate that I worked with about 30 years ago"

Optimise 2020 Attendee

The Results

The results of the conference were overwhelmingly positive. There were almost 900 registered delegates and around 3 hours of Key Notes from Microsoft, Sophos and NetApp. There were also 16 hours of "live-video" updates, providing strategy advice as well as information from industry leading vendors such as Citrix, Nutanix, Lenovo and Darktrace.

Over the 3 days there were over 8,500 views of Optimise content and almost 4,000 virtual booth entries. Delegates spent a combined 472 hours viewing the webinars, proving that **eacs** and their partners hit the mark when it comes to the topics areas they decided to cover. The feedback from

both the delegates and **eacs**' partners has been extremely positive and has shown that the event, although virtual for the first time, provided attendees with all the tools they need to use when planning their future IT Strategy. Further, it also gave **eacs**' partners the opportunity to talk to a new set of prospective customers, which they may not have reached if Optimise IT 2020 had not taken place.

*"Just wanted to say **eacs**, this is the best event I have attended this year – it's fantastic. Great to be able to connect with industry leaders on topics that we need to reflect on."*

Optimise 2020 Attendee

Kevin concluded: "We are extremely proud of how Optimise IT worked. This was an entirely different environment we were simply not expecting this time last year and it was going to be a challenge from the offset. However, with so many organisations having to adapt to the new digital world, we took this as an opportunity. Not only did we get exceptional numbers, unlike a physical event our presentations will be available for the next 12 months. This ensures that attendees can continue to discover how the latest cutting-edge solutions could transform their organisations and understand the top technology and business priorities for IT over the next year."

"Outside of the high engagement over the three days, another previously unforeseen benefit of the event was the sustainability benefits of taking Optimise virtual with the event being fully Carbon Neutral. No single use plastics were used, while no marketing material needed to be printed in the production of this event, as all invites, agendas and handouts were made to be digital. Even more strikingly, by hosting the event on a virtual platform, we estimate that all attendees will have saved an estimated 15 tons of CO2 from not having to travel to the venue. These results truly show how much of a success Optimise was this year and we are now looking to use this achievement as a blueprint for further virtual events in early 2021."

*"Well done **eacs**, this is a great vehicle to get me totally up to speed on what I need to know for my company. Fabulous platform and some great presentations so far - this is the way to go"*

Optimise 2020 Attendee

Summary

The success of Optimise 2020 is a clear example of what can be done virtually to offer the same customer experience as an in-person event. From the feedback we have received, events such as this are here to stay, whether as a mix of in-person and online or fully virtual. The next step for **eacs** is to continue the momentum with monthly half-day virtual events similar in format to Optimise, giving an increased focus to our service area and the solutions we and our partners can offer to support our customers. For more information about our Optimise IT 2020 event, please click here.

Further information can be found our website at www.eacs.com. To speak to one our experts, either call **eacs** **0800 8047 256**, or alternatively email information@eacs.com.