

Leveraging Organizations' Content Online



James Parker
President

CEOCFO: Mr. Parker, what is the focus today for Digitell?

Mr. Parker: The focus today is really to help organizations utilize the Internet as a broadcast channel. Now that bandwidth is readily available pretty much worldwide and it has reached a capacity to allow a very high quality video stream wrapped with a very exciting and engaging experience for the user, it is providing an incredibly exciting opportunity to both drive marketing and exposure to your message but also drive revenue for the world's largest organizations. Digitell mostly focuses on the association space, with most of our clients being organizations in the medical field, the financial and business fields, and in nursing. We really help these organizations drive their content through live online events, and on demand access to the organizations educational. By building an online community we help the organization focus on building an entirely second community of people other than the ones who are physically at their annual meetings as an online audience.

CEOCFO: Traditionally, associations have been a little bit behind in technology and in use of some of the newer methods. Are you finding that in general they are catching up and they realize the need?

Mr. Parker: There is a lot of education involved. I do not know if I would say they are falling behind. They have been behind the curve, and that really has to do a lot with the budgets that are not allocated into the technology sides, and also a lot of the professionals that are in the positions that are making those decisions are north of 40 years old and not as savvy with the technology opportunities that are out there. That is definitely changing as more and more data is being driven into the industry and more turnover of those positions are being sought after by younger professionals. There has definitely been movement of a fairly large amount in the last 12 to 18 months.

CEOCFO: Why the decision to focus on associations?

Mr. Parker: I have actually been servicing the association space since the late 1970s, and I am a product of capturing conferences and producing them on reel to reel tape then audio cassette, then VHS, then DVD and CD-ROM, and then naturally moved to online. For me, it has really been a progression of the space that I have had all of my contacts and know the most about. We certainly are moving into the corporate space as more and more of the data shows that corporations can save money, engage their employees, and really build a nice community that helps with the morale of their company, but most of our business today is in the association space.

CEOCFO: How do you stay ahead of the technologies?

Mr. Parker: I certainly spend a lot of my time looking into the future. I am one that understands that you need to stay on top of what the consumer wants, not necessarily staying with what I have invested in equipment and produce. If the consumer wants to move forward with a new platform or a new format is readily available, then it is important to service the end user with the product they want to be engaged with. Truthfully, every increment of change provides a much more valuable experience to the end user. When I think back on delivering an audio cassette compared to a live stream with 100 professionals on in real time engaging the speaker and engaging with each other, the value that we are delivering is exponentially higher. I focus on that element – how do I provide a greater amount of value? So far, I have been fortunate that the revenue has followed the value.

CEOCFO: When might an association turn to you?

Mr. Parker: I would say that associations should be turning to a company like mine when they are looking to utilize their content to engage their industry. It does not matter the size. Every organization has a message. They have members that

they need to service, and they need to provide value. In 2015, the reality is that people's lives are busy and they cannot necessarily take four to six days to go visit a city and attend their annual meeting, which is really the catalyst of most of the content that an association creates – is at their annual meeting. I think the hurdles that organizations face in moving forward start with cannibalization. Many of the association executives feel that if they broadcast their event, people will not physically come. That has been the most exciting news of the last 18 months, which is that not only will they not cannibalize their meeting, but we are finding that live streaming your event is the most effective marketing tool. Upwards of 30% of online attendees will attend the physical event in the next two years. This is really changing the focus being driven by the education departments of organizations to the marketing departments. As that evolves, I think associations are going to realize that it does not matter whether you have 500 members or 50,000. They all have members who have a need to be able to gain access to an online experience during your event, and they are going to see that this is going to be the most effective marketing tool. The most exciting part too is that it is worldwide. We are not just reaching the United States; we are reaching all four corners of the world, which is giving organizations an opportunity, unprecedented in any case in the past.

CEOCFO: *What is a typical engagement and maybe something a little more outside the box?*

Mr. Parker: Let us take the National Speakers Association. They hired us to live stream their event, and the goal was to make the attendee online wish they were at the meeting. We went ahead and created an on-site studio where we were broadcasting in between the sessions and then switching from that broadcast studio similar to equating it to Monday night football where you have your commentators and then you watch the game and during half time you come back to the commentators. We are taking that model to the association space. What we found is that adding the educational experience with a more personal experience of interviewing attendees, exhibitors, staff and faculty really created a dynamic that made the attendee online wish they were there. We believe that really is the next level – just an online, on-site blend that creates a community of engagement that makes more people want to come to the next year's event.

"I am about your organization's success and making sure that you engage your members in a way that is going to allow you to build on your success year after year." - James Parker

CEOCFO: *When you are working with a company, what is involved?*

Mr. Parker: We spend our initial time helping educate the associations' executives on what is working and what is not. We then focus with them on what their priorities and goals are. If an organization's goal is to extend the reach of their education, then we look at a model that might more involve a sponsorship and free access to the education so that we can get and reach as many people as possible. If the goal of the organization is to start to drive a second revenue stream, then we will look at creating the process where the attendee will register for the online access. We will look at enhancing that online access with additional resources, the PowerPoint, mp3 files to download, and maybe the mouse movements of the presenter, so that we give a very rich educational experience. That way, we suggest that they charge the same amount to attend online as it is to attend physically. We sit around a table and we work with our clients to give them different options and really asking them what is important to their organization. Every organization is different. For some, it is more important to reach international, some it is more important to reach students, some are trying to engage their members, and some are looking for new members. We really look at the whole spectrum of options that they are looking to achieve, and then through our experience in delivering all of these events, we service over 100 clients, we are able to give them a good idea of a strategy. We then execute that strategy in year one, and then we take the time to evaluate the success. Where did we create the value that was most providing an opportunity for future revenue or value driven? If some things worked and some things did not, we focused the next year on those that worked to make them more comprehensive.

CEOCFO: *Are you able to help a company formulate their goals?*

Mr. Parker: We are. In fact, I think through the process what happens is that many organizations do not understand their strategy and do not realize the value that is available to them by delivering a content marketing strategy. I am sure you have heard that term, and that term is being used significantly these days in corporate space as everyone is developing content, blogs and interviews. It is all about creating rich, valuable content and then delivering that through a channel to the end user. For instance, in the association space I really do not think that most associations are focusing past their market of people who are going to attend their meeting. That is vastly different today. Organizations need to be thinking about who are all the different groups of people to reach, but also what are all the peripheral markets that you can reach. When you live stream, there are no limitations necessarily. You want to use your stream to reach your target audience and then effectively reach students who are their future members or international participants who may not want to come to the United States to attend their meeting. You may want to reach out to peripheral organizations, so if you are in

horticulture, maybe you are reaching out to the greenhouse people and the chemists that are working on soil and compost-type strategies. It allows you to broaden your message to such a large group of people that you now bring in a much richer engagement when those people dialogue between each other.

CEOCFO: *How do you reach potential customers?*

Mr. Parker: Our market strategy is really to exhibit at the specific conferences that meeting planners and association executives attend, so ASAE, PCMA, and MPI. Those are all organizations that focus on reaching the event and meeting planner executives. We basically exhibit there. These days, word of mouth is a great way that we are getting a lot of work. We also focus on delivering content, we put out a monthly video newsletter, and we do our own webinars. Webinars are a fantastic way, but what we have done is upped the value of our webinar by utilizing a combination of video and visuals, not just audio and the PowerPoint. We believe that the audio PowerPoint format is dead and it does not engage the user, so we focus on a branded, rich webinar engagement platform that we develop and we use for our clients. We use it for ourselves, and we find that the response to that higher value webinar is exponentially greater.

CEOCFO: *Do you find just the fact that it works well gets people's attention?*

Mr. Parker: That is exactly right. What we offer as a service is managed webcasts, so we have a team of professionals that assure that your webinar works flawlessly. An attendee that comes to a webinar that has technical issues that are not resolved within seconds is not only turned off from the webinar, but they are turned off from your product.

CEOCFO: *I don't think I've ever attended a webinar that did not have some kind of a problem!*

Mr. Parker: Ours run flawlessly, and because of that our client turnover is negligible.

CEOCFO: *How is business these days?*

Mr. Parker: Fantastic. It could not be better. We are growing exponentially, and we are in the process now of expanding our capabilities. In this month's magazines for Convene Magazine, they did a survey of association executives and asked what the number one product was on your wish list, and the answer was live streaming.

CEOCFO: *Put it all together. Why chose Digitell?*

Mr. Parker: I think the reason that you want to select Digitell is our experience, our people, our technologies, and the fact that we care. I am really about the mission, not about the money, and I am about your organization's success and making sure that you engage your members in a way that is going to allow you to build on your success year after year. If my clients are successful, I am successful, so I focus on their success first and follow behind that with our success. When you have a company that focuses that way, not looking at the checkbox of what to do, I think that is a very short-term approach. I take a long-term approach, and I think it has worked for us over the many years. We have gone from 20 employees to 52 employees in four years, and we do presently hold the largest amount of market share at 26 percent of the industry. I really see us growing more because we deliver flawless events. If you cannot deliver a flawless event, you are turning away your audience rather than engaging with them or building on their success.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine



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