



Empowering the travel and tourism industry through
engaging virtual and in-person experiences

60%

increase in attendance
for virtual event

27,000+

engagement points
tracked for in-person
event

90+

inbound exhibitor leads
generated via virtual
booths

The California Travel Association (CalTravel) serves as the voice of the travel and tourism industry in California, helping to protect and advance the interests of California's travel industry through education and collaboration. CalTravel manages several different events annually for their roughly 1,000 members, including state board meetings and their marquee CalTravel Summit.

The CalTravel Summit typically focuses on advocacy at the state level, education, and inspiration for the travel, tourism, and hospitality industry. Here, members can connect and share insights, discuss pressing advocacy issues, and deepen their engagement with the industry. Now in its 39th year, the event usually sees several hundred attendees onsite at a premier California destination. However, the summit had to change course when the global health crisis hit in 2020.



Creating an Engaging Virtual CalTravel Summit with the Cvent Attendee Hub®

CalTravel was initially forced to postpone their annual summit due to the pandemic. However, as the travel and tourism industry was heavily impacted, they decided to move forward with a free virtual conference later that year. This was meant to provide an opportunity to connect professionals at a state level during a time of uncertainty while providing important insights on changing industry trends.

CalTravel needed a reliable virtual platform to support the digital event, one that could offer a fully branded experience with engagement tools to foster interactivity with attendees. With this in mind, the CalTravel team chose to use the integrated Cvent Attendee Hub and Event Management solutions to power their virtual summit. "We really wanted a branded experience that could give us more than a Zoom meeting could," explains Tricia Alvernaz, Operations Director. They were able to customize their brand colors, graphics, and much more within the hub to ensure a fully branded experience for their attendees. "The Attendee Hub really elevated the experience to look more professional for our attendees," Tricia adds.

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The easily navigable platform also meant attendees could manage their session schedule with ease, building their agenda through customized filters and joining sessions with a single click rather than multiple meeting links via email. The entirely live event featured several sessions produced in conjunction with the Cvent Virtual Event 360 team. The team helped manage content capture, video layout, graphic overlays, and more to ensure a highly polished production. "It was a little scary but worked out extremely well, as there were no major glitches or issues in terms of production," notes Barb Newton, President & CEO. Engagement features like session Q&A and chat also drove attendees to engage more deeply with the content and speakers for an enhanced user experience.



Onsite, the summit typically included a Marketplace experience for sponsors and exhibitors. Translating this to a virtual environment would be a challenge. The Attendee Hub showcased a virtual Marketplace with featured sponsors, virtual booths, and inbound lead generation tactics. Attendees could easily join collaborative meetings with exhibitors to chat via video call or submit their information through a "Contact Us" form directly within the virtual booth. CalTravel also featured sponsored virtual sessions within the hub to ensure additional visibility for their high value sponsors. Ultimately, on-demand exhibitor reports helped prove ROI.

While they were initially hesitant to move the experience to virtual, the impact of the event for their organization was immediately evident. They surpassed their initial registration goal by an impressive 60%, with over 800 attendees joining the virtual program. Making the event free for their members helped expand the members they were able to reach. Generally, the in-person event saw high attendance from executive or C-Suite level contacts, whereas the virtual experience was also joined by a large number of non-executive attendees. This created additional opportunities for nurturing those contacts through the funnel as well.

Leading the State with the Safe Return to In-Person Events

In September 2021, the CalTravel team decided to return the summit to an in-person experience. They wanted to support their industry partners and lead the state in showcasing how a safe and successful in-person event could be executed. In fact, they were the first in-person event to take place in California since the start of the pandemic. To do so, they leveraged Cvent's Mobile Event App through the Attendee Hub as well as OnArrival and the Event Management solution. These integrated solutions helped create a secure experience onsite while ensuring a single source of truth for all event data.

First, they needed to create a contactless check-in experience to protect the health and safety of their attendees. Creating a digital badge through OnArrival, easily accessible through each attendee's mobile device, guaranteed a completely contactless process. It also eliminated long queues as an added benefit. "Moving things along in terms of a quick check-in process was crucial during the pandemic, so we really appreciated using the digital badge through OnArrival," says Tricia.

The team ultimately managed 45 sessions onsite across three days for the in-person summit. For premium paid sessions, they used session scanning through OnArrival for a touchless tracking experience. These paid sessions consisted of experiences like their PAC Fundraising Dinner, where capacity limits and session tracking were key for accurate reporting. Session scanning also saved the CalTravel team valuable time and prevented human error. "It was simply too chaotic in years past to manually cross people off a list at the door," says Tricia. "This way, attendees could quickly add it to their registration and it eliminated a lot of manual work."



Supporting Sustainable and Safe Onsite Experiences with the Mobile Event App

The Mobile Event App was also a crucial tool in helping to support the safe onsite experience for CalTravel members. The app allowed attendees to easily build their schedules from the agenda, access important information like the venue map, and confirm health and safety requirements through custom pages. As networking is a primary goal of the summit, attendees could easily connect with one another via one-on-one messaging directly within the app. Push notifications gave CalTravel's team the ability to convey important information to their attendees as well as drive session attendance.

Attendees could also easily access downloadable session documents and collateral to enhance their learnings onsite or after the close of the event. Session duration tracking gave the CalTravel team the ability to see who was attending which sessions and for how long, helping to evaluate the effectiveness of their content and overall program design. They also customized the gamification feature within the app to drive engagement through actions like session attendance, survey completion, and more. Using automated engagement scoring, they tracked an impressive 27,000 engagement points across 364 participants.

Leveraging the Exhibitor Management solution meant exhibitors could easily self-manage tasks like uploading logo files or contact information. Additionally, sponsored sessions within the app gave sponsors important visibility in front of the attendees. They featured sponsor logos prominently on the home page of the app as well as in dedicated Sponsors and Exhibitors sections. In fact, exhibitors generated over 90 inbound leads as a result. With the success of the event app for their 2021 summit, the CalTravel team began using the app at their quarterly board meetings starting in December 2021.



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These meetings feature anywhere from 75 to over 140 attendees each, so eliminating printed materials for each meeting is important. “Our attendees really have everything they need in the palm of their hands, and they’ve responded really well,” says Tricia. By eliminating cumbersome and costly paper agendas at both the board meetings and summit, CalTravel saves untold manual labor hours and reduces costs, all while supporting their sustainability goals. “I love that with the Mobile Event App, we’re no longer dealing with boxes and boxes of printed materials, and we’re seeing higher adoption rates each time,” says Barb. “We’re never going back to printed materials.”

Empowering the Industry with Continued In-Person Experiences

As CalTravel looks towards the near future, they are thrilled to be planning a fully in-person summit for October 2022. “Given that the industry is heavily focused on travel and tourism, we want to support our hotel and venue partners,” says Tricia. She notes that virtual has been a wonderful addition to their toolkit and many organizations are enjoying the success of expanded reach through hybrid experiences. Barb agrees that virtual will always be a good resource to have when the circumstances call for it, but that they remain invested in in-person events for their service providers, hotel partners, and other industry partners.

Looking at the evolution of CalTravel’s experience with event technology throughout the pandemic, Tricia notes she appreciates the bedrock of support built by her Cvent account team as the landscape continues to change. “Our Cvent team has been great to work with, and they’re

always quick to follow up on any questions with materials to help guide us," she says. "They're also always willing to work with us as new features and enhancements come out to tweak and customize our account, which is extremely helpful." Reflecting on her onboarding journey, she advises other new Cvent users to take advantage of the dedicated training, 24/7 support, and readily available resources in the Cvent Community.

As they look forward to their upcoming summit, Barb and Tricia, along with the entire CalTravel team, are thrilled to be bringing 400+ projected attendees together in Palm Springs. They plan to support the event with Cvent technology to ensure attendees have a safe and highly engaging experience. Barb adds, "Cvent has really elevated the professionalism and efficiency of our organization and we're looking forward to the continued partnership."

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