



EVENT TECHNOLOGY OF THE PAST: WHAT HAS CHANGED?

At Concise, we've been mulling over how conferences used to be and what we've learned by sharing our stories of the journey of event technology and the events industry.

From the early days of wired keypads and infrared voting devices in the pre-Wi-Fi era to RF keypads with texting, smartphones, tablets and apps, much has changed over the past couple of decades.

We asked our very own **Jim Hughes** – Head of Sales at our London office – for his thoughts on the transformation of the events industry.

Will his insights reveal room for improvement in terms of audience interaction or have we finally abandoned the passive presentations of days gone by ?

What is the earliest type of technology you can remember using at events?

The earliest technology for audience response I can remember using was a wired keypad system, and it was for a medical conference. The event organisers spent two days taping all of the cables down so that the keypads were in situ on every desk ahead of a one-day conference (meaning they paid for room hire for 3 days !).

The miles and miles of gaffer tape, plus the time not just to lay them down but to peel them up afterwards, was a huge investment and made the carpet stickier than your average London pub.



How were presentations run and was it harder to engage the audience back then?

The birth of PowerPoint made a big difference, as speakers could actually create and amend their own presentations. At my very first event in 1997, all of the presentations were given with 35 mm slides. Audiences generally were very polite, sitting through hour-long presentations followed by a long pause where nobody asked many questions. Generally audiences were passive, and were simply expected to listen. It was a lecture format – very didactic. Often with medical and financial conferences, it was all about the experts at the front of the room, simply telling the audience the way it was and expecting them to understand and follow. Lots of technical information, lots of information that was very hard to see, driven from their slides in 35mm carousels.



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The arrival of PowerPoint meant that slides could be edited and created. It was also the birth of the last-minute presentation because people could create and change their own content.

It was also the start of 'Death by PowerPoint' as presenters would create reams of PowerPoint slides (using the Microsoft default - yellow text on a blue background) and then proceed to read them, not only boring the audiences but often going over their time slot!



What motivated Concise's decision to begin using iPads? Do you remember the first time they were used at an event?

Our first event using iPads was with Deutsche Bank. The driver was the client wanting to put their animations and videos and conference materials onto the latest and greatest technology.

The iPad, even when it was first launched, had the greatest battery life of all the tablets on the market, the best user interface and the best touch screen - it would last 6 hours whereas nothing else came close to it. Back in the day, the other tablets that existed were large and heavy versions of laptop computers, so the iPad was definitely a step forwards – it performs how people want it to.

Have there been any drawbacks to incorporating technological progress into the events industry?

Arguably, you need to spend more time planning and you have to consider your audience's needs. Lots of conferences have collected data with or without technology, but often collating the data takes too long and the data is mothballed and no-one actually acts on it, which leads to expectations not being met.



Voting technology allowed the results to be shown in real-time – live, during the event – and this created excitement and engagement. Suddenly you realise that you're not alone. Even if you're part of the 3% that disagree, rarely are you the only person in the room with that opinion. The fact that anonymity gives good quality data definitely outweighs the investment on time to plan, coordinate and think about your questions.

How do you think event technology has been transformed over the past 20 years? What have we learned?

In the old days, 35mm slides and scripted, staid, rehearsed, repeated presentations were the norm. Experts would be flown around the world to give their talk, which would remain more or less the same for all of their audiences with just a few small modifications. The desire to deliver more flexible and relevant presentations led to the introduction of 'Death by PowerPoint' and allowing speakers to bore audiences - those are the crimes against the events industry that event planners of the 1990s should be held accountable for.

Technology creates better interaction and engagement and can provide anonymity and increased honesty. Now, you've got

strategic data collection and analysis, voting data and real-time results, you can determine whether people are engaged and have understood the key messages.

From 35 mm slides to conference apps, event technology truly has been on a journey of self-discovery. With more and more opportunities to learn from attendees, I think we can argue that these developments have become increasingly audience-focused – we are able to see events from the other side. As technology is developing, so is audience engagement.



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The journey is far from over, however. For more industry insights, look out for our Event Technology of the Present feature to find out where we are now in the world of conference technology.



You've learned about the Event Technology of the Past, now look to the future – **Concise run interactive app solutions for live events**, offering audience engagement solutions for your upcoming conferences in 2016.