

# Second Life Experiment Shows the Benefits of Virtual Events



An innovative initiative by two meetings and events industry associations has highlighted the ability of virtual events to enhance interaction with delegates and speakers.

The findings stem from an educational event on the benefits and applications of Second Life technology, jointly organised by Eventia and the Institute of Travel and Meetings for their members.

Entitled An Experiment With Second Life, the two associations ran the same content in both a real-life scenario at Event UK in Birmingham and through virtual Second Life technology the following day. They then surveyed delegates about their experience.

Delegates scored registration and joining instructions 11% higher for the live event than the virtual, while speaker feedback was consistently better, with an average 9% higher scores in the real-life event over the virtual.



However, ease of interaction with delegates and speakers was scored higher in the virtual conference than in real life by 2% and 10% respectively. What's more, those attending virtually would have expended approximately 690kg of CO2 by attending the real-life event.

Commenting on the experiment, Paul Tilstone, ITM CEO said: “Those who attended the virtual event seemed to comment very favourably on the format, but there are clearly some lessons to be learned on the engagement with delegates prior to the event, and people preferred hearing from speakers in the flesh.

“The statistics on interaction, however, are interesting as they demonstrate that virtual technology actually aids interaction rather than hindering it as one might expect, so clearly this aspect could drive the technology application for certain types of event.”



Meanwhile, Eventia’s chief executive, Izania Downie, described the initiative as a really interesting exercise. “It demonstrates the exciting areas where we can work together as two associations, coming at the same space from different angles,” she said.

“I think the results highlight that there is a potential application for the technology in the events arena, but the evidence to date seems to suggest it is predominantly on a complimentary basis to real-life events, and won’t replace the benefits people get from face-to-face interaction.”

By **Ian Whiting**

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