



CASE STUDY:

Casting a Wider Net: The Event Camp Twin Cities Post-Event Content Strategy

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*Samuel J. Smith
Co-Chair, Event Camp Twin Cities 2010*

“Let’s not forget that the content at ECTC was magnetic. They wouldn’t have read it, watched it, or shared it if it weren’t great content.”

*Ray Hansen
Co-Chair, Event Camp Twin Cities 2010*

Onsite photos: Noah Wolf Photography

Casting a Wider Net: The Event Camp Twin Cities Post-Event Content Strategy

Event Camp Background

The Event Camp conference brand is a unique, face-to-face expression of a community formed online, and possibly the first conference series that can trace its origins back to a Twitter community. The first Event Camp gathering, in February 2010 in New York, grew out of conversations on the #eventpros hashtag on Twitter. After participating online, event professionals saw the value in meeting each other in person to extend their interactions.

Event Camp Twin Cities took place September 8–9, 2010. The event was designed as an innovation lab for events, built around four keywords: *social*, *innovation*, *collaboration*, and *experimentation*. The event featured innovations in all aspects of event design—from seating, to formats, to technology.



The core objectives of Event Camp Twin Cities were to

- Create experiences in a low-risk environment that would show attendees how to build interactive experiences
- Inspire people to try new things in their own events

As Smith and Hansen wrote on the event website:

Event Camp will have succeeded if you can go home and say the following:
“Yes, I have now seen how hybrid event technology, social media, and new collaborative formats can transform events. Yes, we could try _____ at our event. We may not be able to do it without help—but, yes, we could do it. AND we could do it 10 times better than those crazy people at Event Camp Twin Cities.”

Event Camp Twin Cities was broadcast live to the world on September 9, 2010. There were 75 face-to-face participants in Minneapolis and 25 in remote pods in Basel and Dallas. More than 550 people participated remotely.

Pre-Conference Marketing Strategy

Event Camp Twin Cities launched in a backward way. The co-chairs set the date, secured a venue, and put up a website. Once they had defined the core mission for their event, they published it and went out to find speakers, attendees, and sponsors with ideas that matched the objectives.

Smith and Hansen used content-rich blog posts and social media to build interest in the event. For example, they knew they wanted to create a radically different environment for attending an event, so they asked the online community what would happen if organizers threw out the chairs. The post generated positive comments, along with enough cautionary feedback that they just decided to keep some of the chairs. They replaced the rest with exercise balls and couches.

In the three months leading up to the event, the two co-chairs published a series of blog posts that

- Tested ideas for the event
- Announced event highlights
- Profiled speakers and registered attendees through advance interviews
- Distributed video content
- Explained how to participate in the event

Blog and social media distribution via Twitter and LinkedIn were the main drivers for attention on the website. The real power came from members of a growing online community sharing their ideas with others.



During the Meeting

The Role of Twitter

Twitter is a powerful resource for sharing ideas and comments. It is also the home base for the #eventprofs community. Event Camp used Twitter to connect and engage the attendees in four different ways.

- **News Tweets:** The Conference Publishers provided a reporting team to tweet out the “highlights” from each presentation under the official event hashtag. The number of tweets per session varied depending on the nature of the content. More than 200 news tweets were sent out on the day of the event.
- **Voting:** Twitter integration with PollEverywhere allowed the face-to-face audience, the remote pods, and online participants to use Twitter to respond to audience response questions during the event.

- **Questions and comments:** Equally important, attendees used Twitter to flag logistical issues and send questions to speakers and event organizers. Twitter questions from remote attendees were answered onsite in Minneapolis and live-streamed to all the other audiences.
- **Discussion:** During group discussions, attendees tweeted comments to the #ectc10 hashtag and shared their ideas as a massive, virtual breakout group. In retrospect, 550 people interacting through one online moderator did not constitute a discussion session—they were the equivalent of a substantial conference. But the experience still demonstrated the power of using technology to help an audience interact across geography and time zones.

Generating Digital Assets

Events generate digital content in a variety of formats. A key question for organizers is how to curate and repackaging those assets to create content and sustain momentum after a meeting ends.

Event Camp Twin Cities spawned a considerable volume of digital content, including photos, videos, tweets, group documents, slides, and presentations.

Video	9 hours
Event photos (excluding photos by attendees)	110
Tweets	3,400
Highlight and summary articles	16
Group documents	2
Slide decks	3
Articles by presenters	2
Videos produced by attendees	3

These assets were recombined and repackaged to help tell the story of the event in the weeks that followed.

Elements of a Post-Event Content Strategy

Defining the Strategy

An organization's goals, objectives, and resources should dictate post-event strategy and determine how you execute the project. To support the core purposes of Event Camp Twin Cities—creating a low-risk environment where attendees could learn how to build interactive experiences, and inspiring them to try new things in their own events—organizers outlined the following objectives for their post-event strategy:

- Spread the thoughts, ideas and content from Event Camp Twin Cities as widely as possible.
- Use media partners, blogs, and Twitter as key distribution channels.
- Adopt a two-pronged content distribution strategy of publishing short “highlight” posts on high-traffic sites, with links to longer session recaps, videos, and highlights on the Event Camp Twin Cities and Engage365 websites.
- Use an editorial calendar to map out a weekly content distribution plan for all outlets.



Tempting as it is in the weeks before an event to focus all attention on the days onsite, the need to think farther ahead was an enduring lesson from Event Camp Twin Cities. Smith stressed the need to “work

on your post-event strategy before the event starts, so you can start executing right after it ends.”

Any post-event distribution strategy will stand or fall on the ability to place content where the target audience—past and potential future attendees, and anyone else with an interest in the subject matter—will see it and read it.

Based on their pre-event strategy, Event Camp Twin Cities organizers knew they could generate website traffic by posting fresh content on the ECTC website and sharing it via social media. After the event, the objective of getting key takeaways and ideas in front of the widest possible audience dictated a more comprehensive approach.

Step 1: Identify Digital Media Properties to Leverage for Distribution

For almost any onsite audience, there is a collection of digital media sites that have earned participants' respect and confidence. To reach meeting and event professionals with an interest in social media and virtual/hybrid meetings, ECTC arranged access to the following sites for post-event content distribution:

- Engage365 Community, a social media in events community with more than 900 members
- Event Coup Blog, with more than 2,000 subscribers

- Event Camp Twin Cities Community, ECTC’s own event community, with more than 300 members
- Event Camp Twin Cities Blog, a news feed with several dozen subscribers
- Biz Bash Hub, a media property with more than 10,000 subscribers that curates dozens of industry blogs in one place
- Meeting Support Institute, the European content hub for Project Meeting Architecture

Step 2: Consider Social Media Distribution Options

The place of social media in the distribution mix for conference content depends on the demographics of the target audience—beginning with onsite participants, but extending to anyone with an interest in the subject matter. For a conference that literally grew out of a virtual community, the question was not whether to distribute content online, but which social media tools to emphasize. Organizers settled on a strategy that relied on:

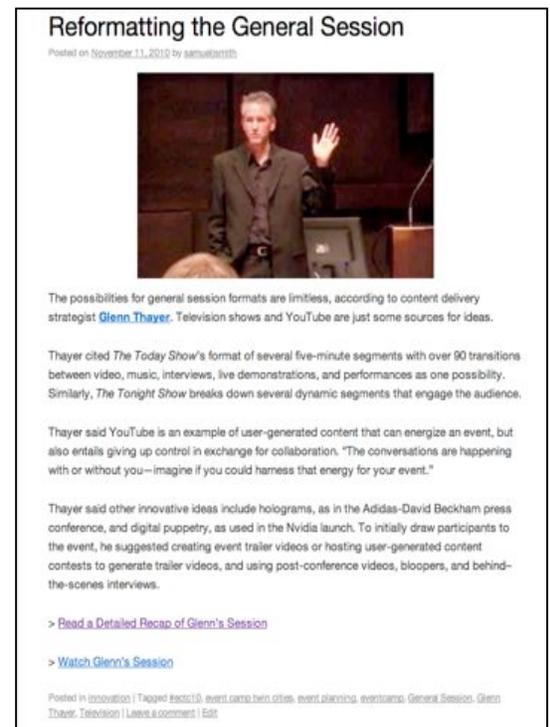
- **Twitter**, using the @eventcamptc twitter feed and the #ectc10 and #eventprofs hashtags to distribute posts
- **LinkedIn** groups serving meeting and event professionals, where ECTC organizers used their member status to post news

Although Facebook is the world’s largest content-sharing site, with more than 500 million users, ECTC organizers decided against setting up a Facebook fan page or presence. In retrospect, this was a missed opportunity.

Step 3: Determine the Right Content and Format

It is essential to determine the most useful, compelling content mix for your audience and deliver it in the format (or, more likely, the mix of formats) that will most effectively capture and hold their attention. By posting each individual session as a separate “story” and providing a choice of verbatim video, shorter news capsules, longer summary text, and photos, ECTC organizers

- Ensured that any site visitor could find the information they wanted, at the level of detail they needed, when and where they needed it
- Made it easier to tag and index the content by theme and session—and, potentially, for other organizations to integrate it with their own online content management systems
- Made content more readily accessible to online search engines



Step 4: Set an Editorial Calendar

Organizers agreed to distribute content to media partners and social media channels weekly, on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. It is generally considered an accepted practice to avoid major electronic distribution on a Monday, when target recipients may be preoccupied with a weekend email backlog, or in the latter part of the week, when they are more focused on immediate deadlines.

Step 5: Secure Agreement to Publish Content

Before publishing conference content, it is essential to secure speakers' agreement that their material will be repurposed and, likely, transformed into one or more summary formats. ECTC organizers also discussed content and formats with their media and social media partners.

Step 6: Develop a Deliberate Strategy for Packaging Post-Conference Content

When conference content appears online, the packaging of the site is just as important as the message. Headlines, photos, links, subtitles, and calls to action all play a crucial part in building and sustaining a post-conference social network.

On ECTC's post-conference website, each piece of content had seven key elements: the headline, subtitles, a photo, verbatim video clips, the actual copy, links, and a call to action (share button, Tweet button, Facebook Like button).

A WORD OF CAUTION!

Wider distribution is an end goal of any content strategy, but republishing identical content carries a serious risk: If Google crawlers detect the same material showing up on multiple sites, the content will be penalized, and will place lower on the world's leading search engine. To maximize reach and optimize search engine placement, it is essential to rewrite each piece, so that it delivers a consistent message in a series of (slightly) unique packages.

Step 7: Assemble the Right Mix of Collaborators

A successful post-conference content site (like a successful hybrid meeting) depends on a wider range of skills and experience than most groups can bring together under one roof. Particularly for small and medium organizations, assembling the right mix of collaborators is the key to success.

The main ingredients supporting the Event Camp Twin Cities team included:

- Overall vision, strategy, and plan: Samuel J. Smith, Interactive Meeting Technology, LLC, ECTC Co-Founder, Minneapolis, MN, <http://interactivemeetingtechnology.com/>
- Video clips: Sonic Foundry Inc., Madison, WI, www.sonicfoundry.com

- News tweets, news capsules, detailed recaps: The Conference Publishers Inc., Ottawa, Canada, www.theconferencepublishers.com
- Republishing: Engage365, Madison, WI; BizBash Media, New York; Event Coup blog, www.eventcoup.com; Meeting Support Institute, Turnhout, Belgium



Step 8: Monitor and Measure

One advantage of digital content is the ease with which content producers can measure audience response. ECTC organizers used page views as the primary benchmark for the reach of post-conference content. (Results are summarized later in this case study.)

Step 9: Align with In-House Communications and Publications

Whether the window of opportunity lasts weeks or months, the flow of communications after a conference will eventually wind down. But the organizations and communities that were a part of that flow will continue. ECTC cemented the link between the onsite and post-conference dialogues by circulating each news capsule to the conference

community in a series of emails that linked back to the post-conference website. The community also benefited from post-conference articles by two leading industry influencers: David Adler, CEO and founder of BizBash Media, and Erica St. Angel, Vice-President of Marketing at Sonic Foundry Inc.



One of the simplest, most powerful steps organizers can take to maximize the life and impact of their content is to align and archive it with organizations that have the need, interest, and capacity to carry it into the future. Event Camp Twin Cities did this by partnering with Engage365, BizBash Media, Event Coup, and the Meeting Support Institute.

Results

In the three months following the conference, ECTC news capsules, summary reports, and hosted distributions generated more than 67,000 page views, and video content yielded more 750 views, as follows:

	News Capsules	Detailed Summary
Event Camp Twin Cities Website	212	638
ECTC Conference Community Site	2135	-
Engage365.org	-	642
Meeting Support Institute	317	
BizBash Hive article	313	
Event Coup	64,235	
TOTALS	67,212	1,280

	Whole Program	Individual Segments
Video Views	440	334

Although ECTC organizers were pleased with the distribution of post-conference content, the results tell a number of different stories.

- The wide variation in page views across the various distribution channels pointed to the need for organized, continuous outreach to social and conventional media partners. Conference organizers must *always* work from the assumption that secondary distributors are as busy as anyone else in the meetings or digital media industries, and will need reminders and prompts to be sure that they distribute post-conference content as widely and consistently as they intend.
- Different distribution platforms have different techniques for aggregating content and measuring readership. Mechanisms for tracking the impact of post-conference content must extend beyond page views and capture subscription-based RSS readers like Feedburner as well as direct page hits. It is tremendously

important to establish measurement and tracking strategies in initial discussions with digital partners, long before a conference goes onsite.

- The available data indicate that text-based content was used far more widely than video in the post-conference period, and that shorter news capsules were far more popular than longer text summaries. This result reflects the needs of a time-challenged audience that appears to have welcomed the availability of strong content in bite-sized chunks, as well as the preference that online audiences often demonstrate for short, skimmable summaries.
- *The caution* is that different audiences will likely expect different levels of detail in their post-conference content, in different formats, and for different purposes. Further research with a wider range of meetings and audience groups would help clarify the content mix that is ideal in the wide range of circumstances that meeting and event professionals encounter onsite, as well as the link placement, calls to action, and other content strategies that will optimize readership and click-throughs.

The Takeaways

Event Camp Twin Cities 2010 took place at a time of turbulent change in the global meetings and events industry. With meeting organizers searching for practical, affordable ways of making virtual meetings work, ECTC modelled a successful approach that combined effective face-to-face meeting design, deliberate use of event technology, and extensive reliance on online communities. Most significantly, by generating sustained interest in conference content in the three months after participants went home, ECTC pointed the way for any organization that wants to turn a two- or three-day event into a catalyst for dialogue that continues after participants go home.

Like any initiative that breaks new ground, ECTC learned some of its best lessons through trial and error, leading to a quote from co-chair Samuel J. Smith that later

became iconic in some corners of the industry: "Experimentation is our get out of jail free card. If we weren't having tech hiccups, we wouldn't be innovating." Subsequent Event Camp conferences have continued to carry the flag for experimental designs that combine the best of face-to-face meetings and online interaction, and ECTC organizers are eager to learn from their peers when the 2011 conference goes onsite in Minneapolis (and several other locations) August 25-26.



Event Camp Twin Cities acknowledges Mitchell Beer, CMM, President of The Conference Publishers Inc., as principal author of this white paper.

