

STRATEGIC AND INNOVATIVE EVENT SPONSORSHIP

HOW MEETING PROFESSIONALS CAN DRIVE VALUE
FOR THE ASSOCIATION, PARTNERS AND ATTENDEES

「*projection*」

Introduction

In its **2024 Meetings Market Survey**, PCMA found that 55% of meeting planners are reimagining sponsorship opportunities in order to offset expenses, highlighting the important role sponsors continue to play for the meetings industry. But, like so many aspects of events post-COVID, their role is changing and evolving—and so are their demands.

For most sponsors of association meetings today, a return on investment (ROI) comes from being able to tie their dollars to a business goal (or goals), not simply seeing their logo on a banner near the registration desk.

“Associations are in a unique position to connect sponsors with their audiences. Rather than having to chase individuals down in the hallway at an event, we are able to design a sponsorship opportunity to put brands in a room with dozens or more of the people they’re looking to meet.” Jason Keith, Chief Development and Operations Officer, American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons

The new emphasis on outcome-driven sponsorships provides an opportunity for meeting planners to do what they do best: find creative ways to help sponsors connect the dots between

their goals and a meeting’s attendees. The best part is, both sponsors and the planning team can benefit. For example, bringing in new technology, such as a 90-foot LED wall, allows the meeting team to elevate the attendee experience and sponsors to share custom content in a high-traffic area.

In this guide, we will discuss the evolving role of event sponsorships, how planners can leverage that new role to enhance their meetings, real-world examples for future meetings, and how to measure success.



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The Evolving Role of Event Sponsorships

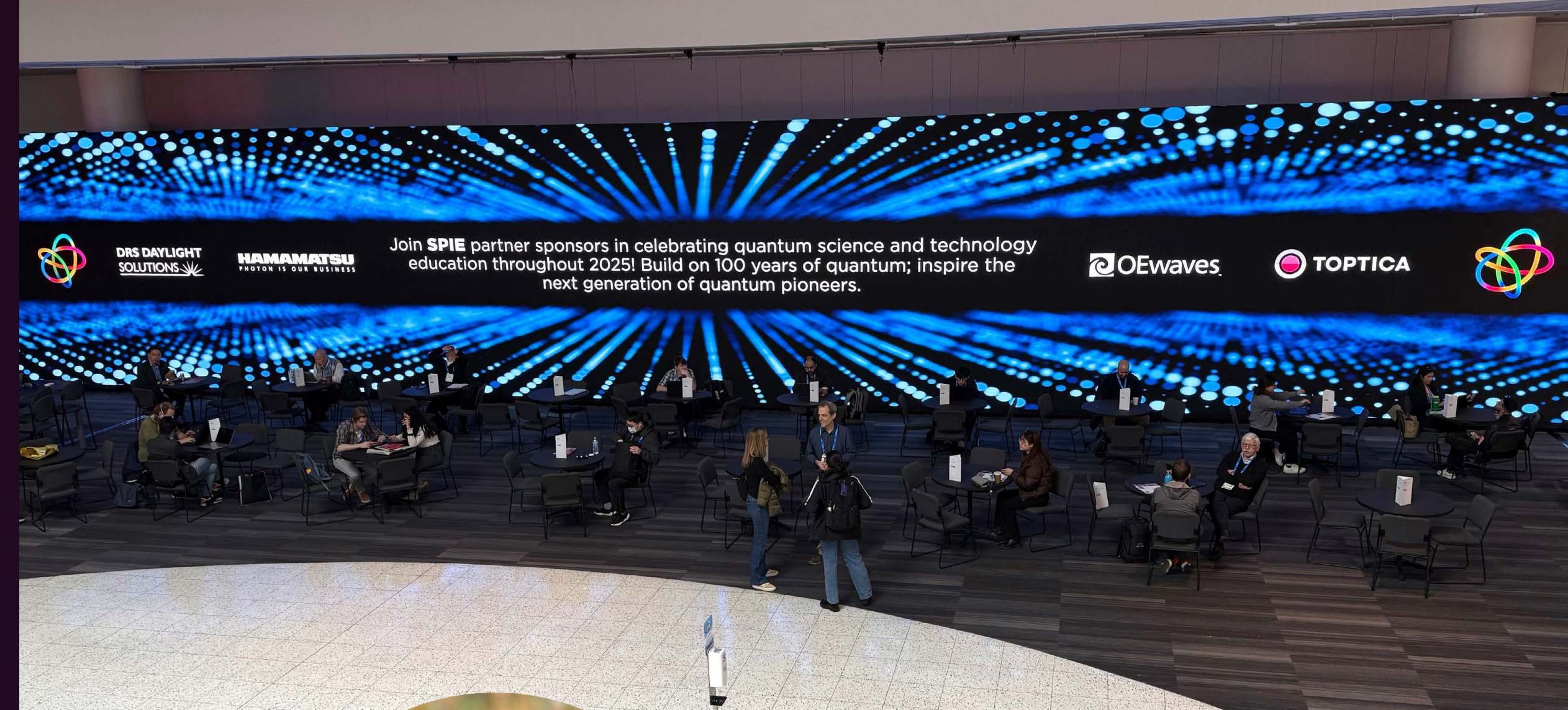
When organizations think of event sponsorships, the images that come to mind might be signs around the venue with different logos, a branded luncheon, and elevator clings. While those items are still present at events, the quantity is declining and expectations are changing - for both sponsoring companies and an association's members. Sponsors want to connect with the audience in more meaningful ways, and attendees want more meaningful experiences.



"When I first started in meetings, there were banners and signs everywhere – at registration, in the halls, on escalators and in elevators. Emerging from COVID shutdowns, that has shifted. At events today, I notice a major pullback from on-site branding, further driving home the reality that it's becoming more important for sponsoring companies to drive engagement."

*Jason Keith, Chief Development and Operations Officer,
American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons*

In addition to evolving expectations, meetings teams are up against a new challenge: tightening budgets. As teams face pressure to do more with less, sponsorships are becoming even more important, as the revenue can both support existing and traditional meeting components and/or allow the team to add new, innovative technology.



"A planner's role is about making sure the on-site experience is exceptional, so looking for opportunities that don't require you to dig into your pockets is a must these days. I am always asking: 'how can I elevate this experience for the attendee without increasing my budget?' It forces me to look at everything we want to do in a different way."

*Jenifer Dodds, Senior Director,
Events and Exhibition Services, SPIE*

Leveraging Planners' Strengths: Getting Creative

[About Sponsorships]

While some organizations have a separate team or individual in marketing or development dedicated to sponsorships, the opportunity for the meetings team to play a role continues to expand. For example, if there's a new technology you'd like to add to the annual meeting, such as digital signage, but your budget is already tight, you might think through ways to add new sponsorship opportunities – e.g., sponsored videos – to pay for it.

As attendees demand more [personalized](#) and interactive experiences, and sponsors demand more meaningful interactions with those attendees, planners are uniquely positioned to bring those together.



"We are hearing from sponsors that they want more meaningful interactions with our members, especially students and early-career periodontists. So, we created several sponsorship opportunities that enable them to connect with those audiences: a leadership program, a resident retreat, and a dedicated reception for young periodontists. We have seen a lot of success with those opportunities that go beyond a logo."

*Michelle Weil, director of professional relations,
American Academy of Periodontology*

If an organization is not set up to handle sponsorships in-house, there are external consultants and organizations positioned to help navigate – and take advantage – of this evolving landscape.



"As a third-party tradeshow company, we often create and execute experiential sponsorships for our clients. The best experiential sponsorships involve educating attendees about a trending topic, but in a fun, interactive way - not just a meeting room with a speaker. We recommend planners ask this question, "What educational trends can be turned into experiences that companies would support?" And, if you don't know, ask your current exhibitors and sponsors. Ask them for ideas on educational experiences that they could support. Let them help you plan it - not just ask for sponsorship money. If companies can be involved in the planning of the educational experience, they are likely to financially support it."

Jennifer Kerhin, CEO, SB Expos & Events

Don't yet have a sponsorship playbook for the meetings team? Here are a few actions to get started:



Meet with the sponsorship team to identify ways you can complement their work.



Think about the association's vision through the following lens: *how can sponsors [at my meeting] help move along the path to that vision?*



Collect feedback from members/attendees: what kinds of experiences do they want?



Review a meeting's activations, components, and experiences: are there any opportunities to "monetize" them through sponsorships?



Consider any new activations, experiences or technology you'd like to add to your meeting: are there opportunities to offset the cost through sponsorships?



Collect feedback from current exhibitors/sponsors: What kind of educational experiences would be valuable to them?

Taking Inspiration from Real-world Examples

Meeting planners know that inspiration is everywhere—and this is no different. Ask friends and colleagues at other associations. Pay attention at other events to how sponsors are represented. Look outside your industry (for example, at corporate events).

You don't have to go far. We've provided some inspiration from Projection clients and industry experts to help you get started.

"I make it a priority to connect with our sponsors throughout the year to ensure we are aligned. At least once, that meeting is in person. We discuss our goals and how they can help us achieve them and I listen for ways we can support them in achieving theirs."

*Jason Keith,
Chief Development and Operations Officer,
American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons*



American Academy of Periodontology

The American Academy of Periodontology continues to get creative when it comes to opportunities that enable sponsors to connect directly with the association's members. For years, the corporate forum at the Annual Meeting has been one of the most successful, bringing in nearly 40% of the association's revenue. Each year, organizations rush to be one of the few that are able to be a part of this pre-conference event. As partners continue to look for opportunities to drive more meaningful interactions with their audiences, the American Academy of Periodontology seeks to design experiences that align with both the partner and association's goals. For example, they added a leadership program and next year will be offering a resident retreat.

Corporate Forum - These are sponsored sessions, essentially paid advertisements, for the sponsors and their products. AAP provides the classroom set-up, and the sponsors provide the speakers and content, and in some cases, CE, if the sponsors are accredited.

Leadership Program - This is a weekend-long leadership training program for up-and-coming members of the Academy that is sponsored and allows sponsors access to current and future leaders of the organization.



“In addition to these experiences, we hear a lot from sponsors who want to speak at our events. We have to be thoughtful in creating speaking opportunities for corporations that want to share their latest scientific and clinical innovations because we must keep within the association’s CE guidelines. So, we created smaller events, such as the corporate forum, a speaker studio in the exhibit hall, and a lunch n’ learn, where they can present on a topic of their choice. This gets partners in front of our members, offers an opportunity for attendees to gain knowledge on important topics, tools, and new research, and ensures compliance - a win all around.”

Michelle Weil, director of professional relations, American Academy of Periodontology

SPIE, the international society for optics and photonics

With annual attendance around 23,000, the planners behind SPIE's Photonics West meeting are always looking for new and innovative ways to deliver the kinds of experiences that wow its members.

In 2019 the event introduced a 87' wide by 18' tall LED wall where images of photonics in real life scrolled, tying the event's theme, that changes each year, to the work of the engineers and scientists who advance light-based science and technology in their work. The wall quickly became a popular attraction at the annual event. The meetings team looks for new ways to leverage this eye-catching technology every year. Looking ahead to 2026, the team will be

integrating sponsors—with certain times dedicated to partner sponsorships—in an effort to add an additional revenue source and offset the cost of the wall.

"In addition to offsetting the cost of the LED wall at Photonics West, we look for ways to repurpose the LED tiles—and other tech we've purchased—for other events. We work with our production and AV teams to identify ways to make them look different so that we can get the most out of everything we can.

I'm always asking, 'How many times can I use this and make it look different?'"

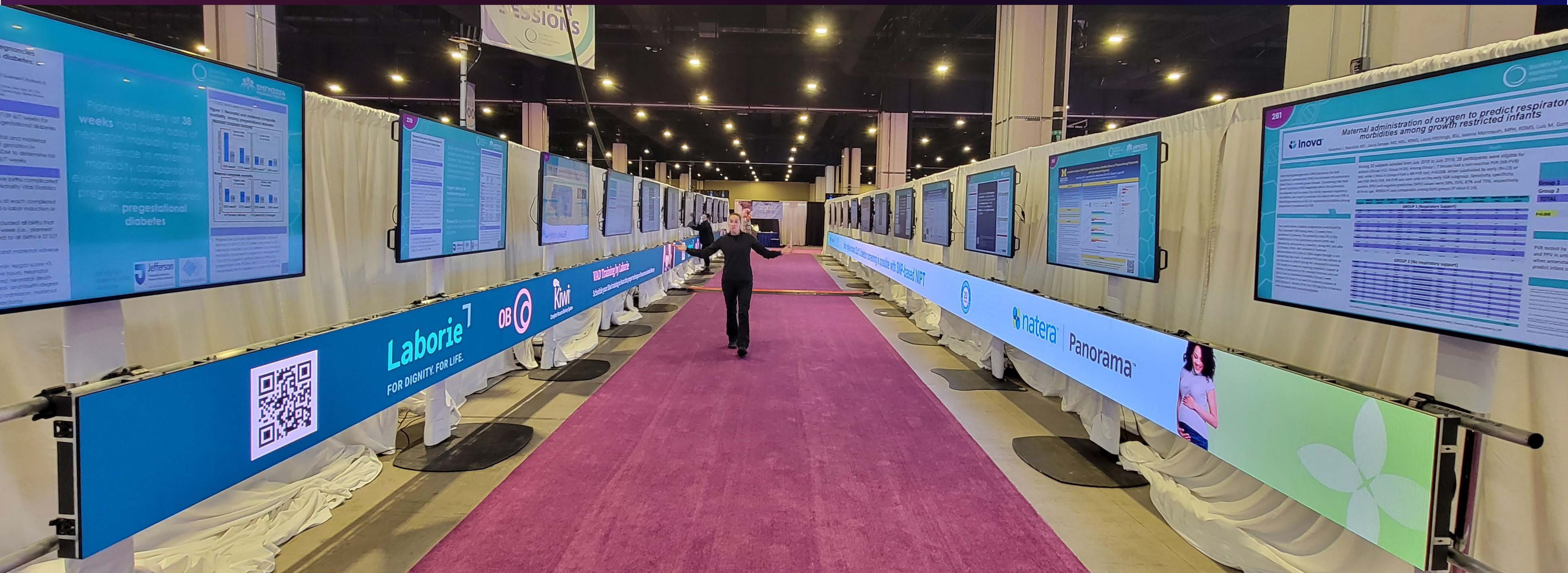
Jenifer Dodds, Senior Director, Events and Exhibition Services, SPIE



Tech-enabled sponsorship opportunities

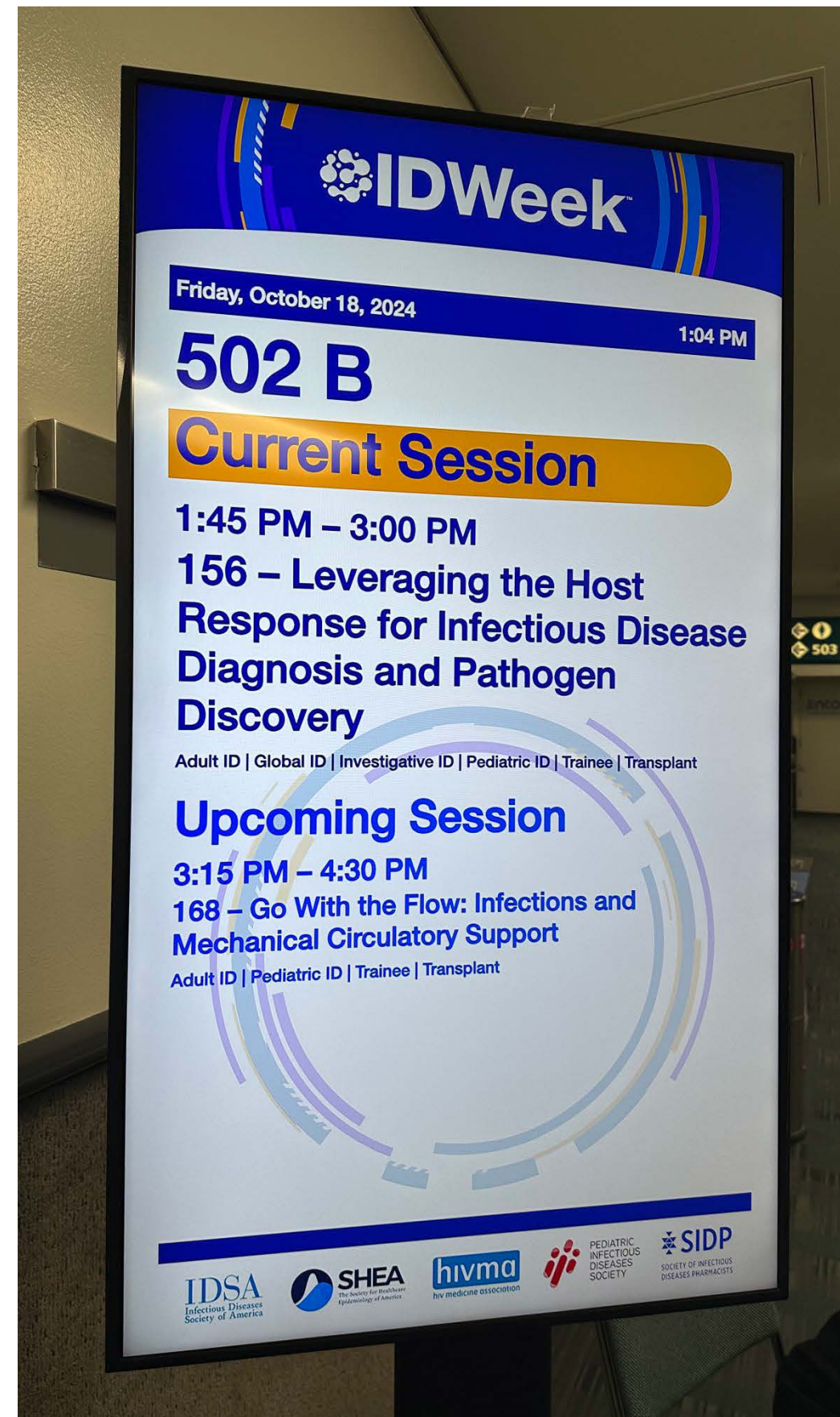
Sponsors can play an important role in enhancing the attendee experience through event technology initiatives and activations. These opportunities represent a win-win for both the association and sponsoring company by creating a better experience for members/attendees and the high-touch, high-value opportunities for which today's sponsors are looking.

Below are opportunities to brand event technology that will enhance your attendees' experience.



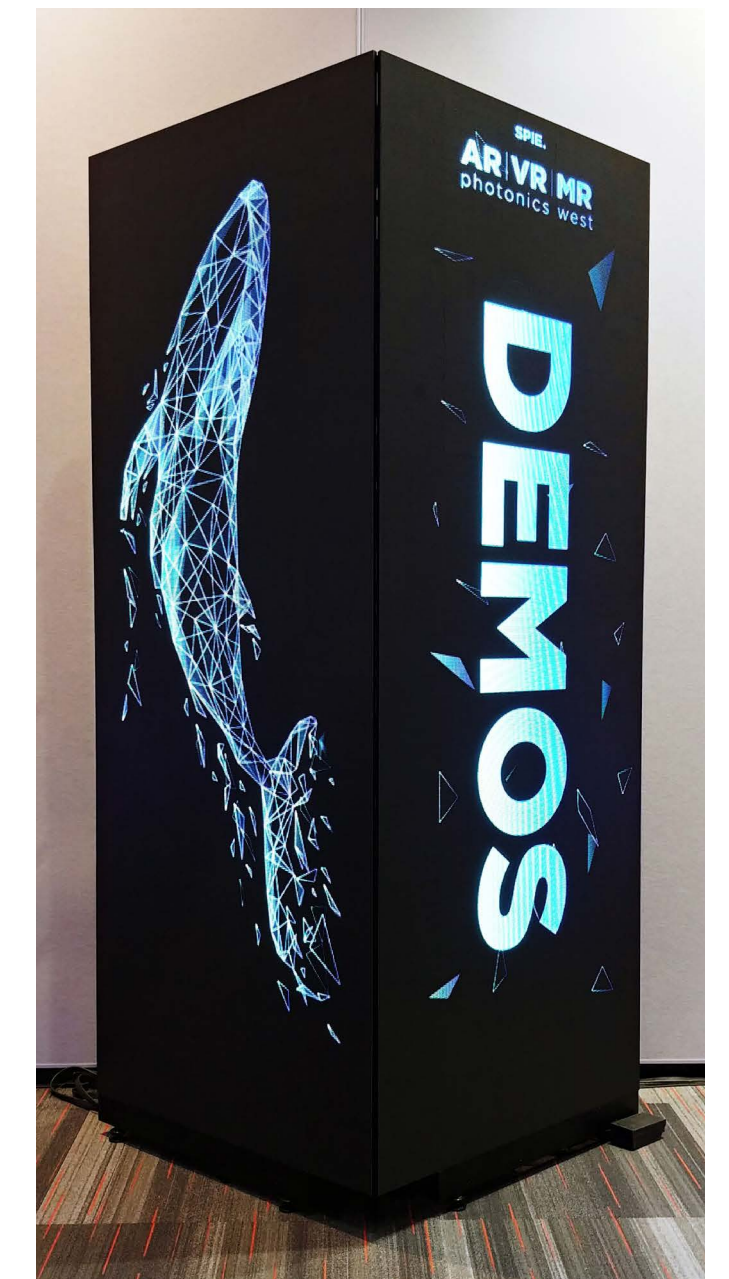
Digital signage

- Standalone digital signs or LED towers positioned in high-traffic areas for information and/or directions (e.g., outside session rooms, near registration, welcoming attendees to the exhibit floor) can rotate scheduled sponsored content, such as videos or branded screen visuals.
- Many convention centers, such as the [Walter E. Washington Convention Center](#), offer built-in digital signage displays. Planners can work with their AV and production partner to create content and sell scheduled sponsor placements for these existing displays.



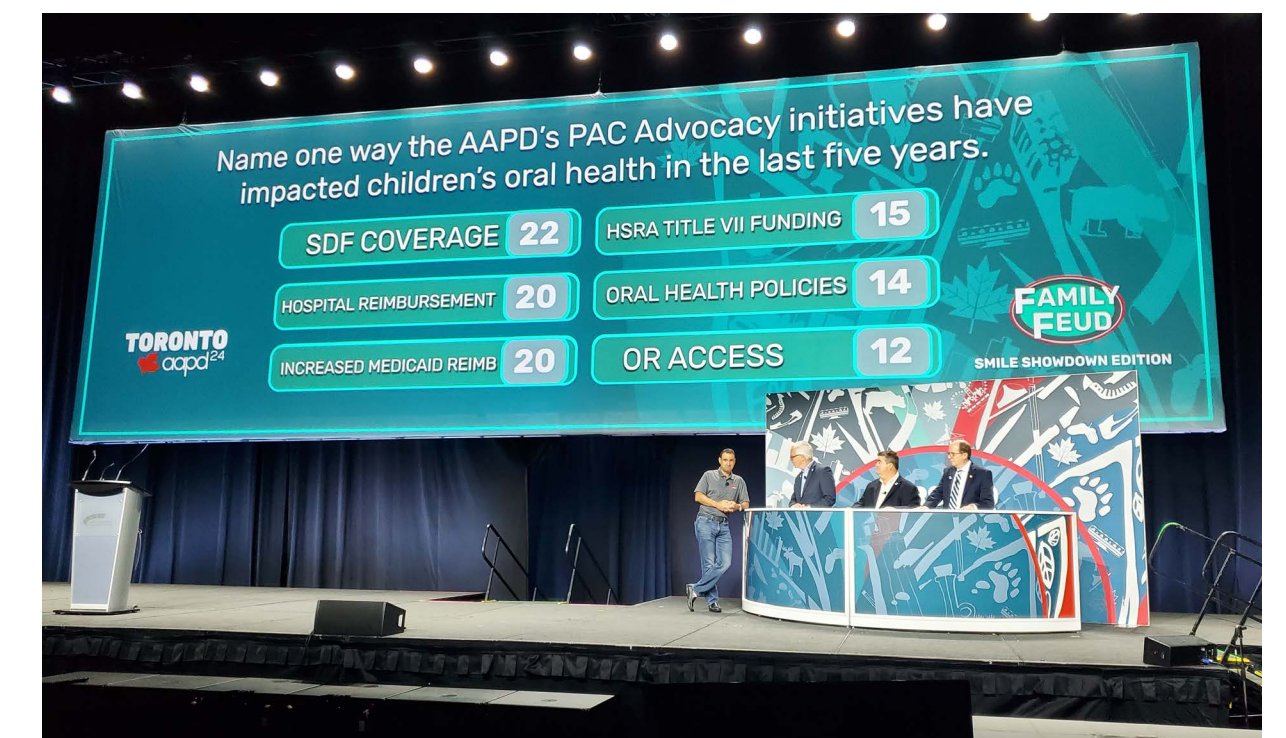
LED as signage in public spaces - a dynamic and sustainable solution

- LED display technology is a versatile tool for the public areas within event venues. Modular LED tiles are custom configured to build high-resolution displays of various shapes and sizes which help supplement existing venue signage.
- Sponsored content can be showcased on a much larger display; sponsors can choose to “buy out” the full display to maximize the attention and impact of their content, or the real estate can be divided up to showcase multiple sponsors at once.



In the General Session

- The GS is the time and place at your meeting where your attendees' attention is at its peak, making it a prime opportunity for sponsors. Branded content can be integrated throughout the run of show, from videos played during walk-in/walk-out to scripted sponsor mentions or sponsored “commercial” breaks. Your emcee can also play a key role by introducing sponsor segments, weaving in brand messaging, or even engaging in light interaction with the sponsor themselves – helping the content feel authentic, connected, and stageworthy. You can also create interactive moments, like a live game show, that not only energize the room, but provide sponsors an opportunity to engage the audience and reinforce their brand in a fun, memorable way.



Innovation/industry theaters

- Give sponsors a platform (while staying compliant with CE restrictions) to showcase their latest technology or industry insights to attendees in short presentations on the exhibit floor.

Podcast Studio

- Create a branded space where sponsors can host or record podcasts during the event—featuring thought leadership, attendee interviews, or live panel-style discussions. These sessions can be streamed live, played back in the event app, or used in post-event campaigns, giving sponsors content they can share long after the event ends.
- **Bonus:** these assets can be used post-event for ongoing marketing value.



Interactive technology activations

- Design an activation where attendees can interact with sponsored/branded content such as touchscreen displays or immersive demos (e.g., an interactive historical timeline of the association and/or event), holographic content (e.g., an interactive AI “emcee”), or mobile app gamification where attendees must engage with specific content or booths to win rewards.

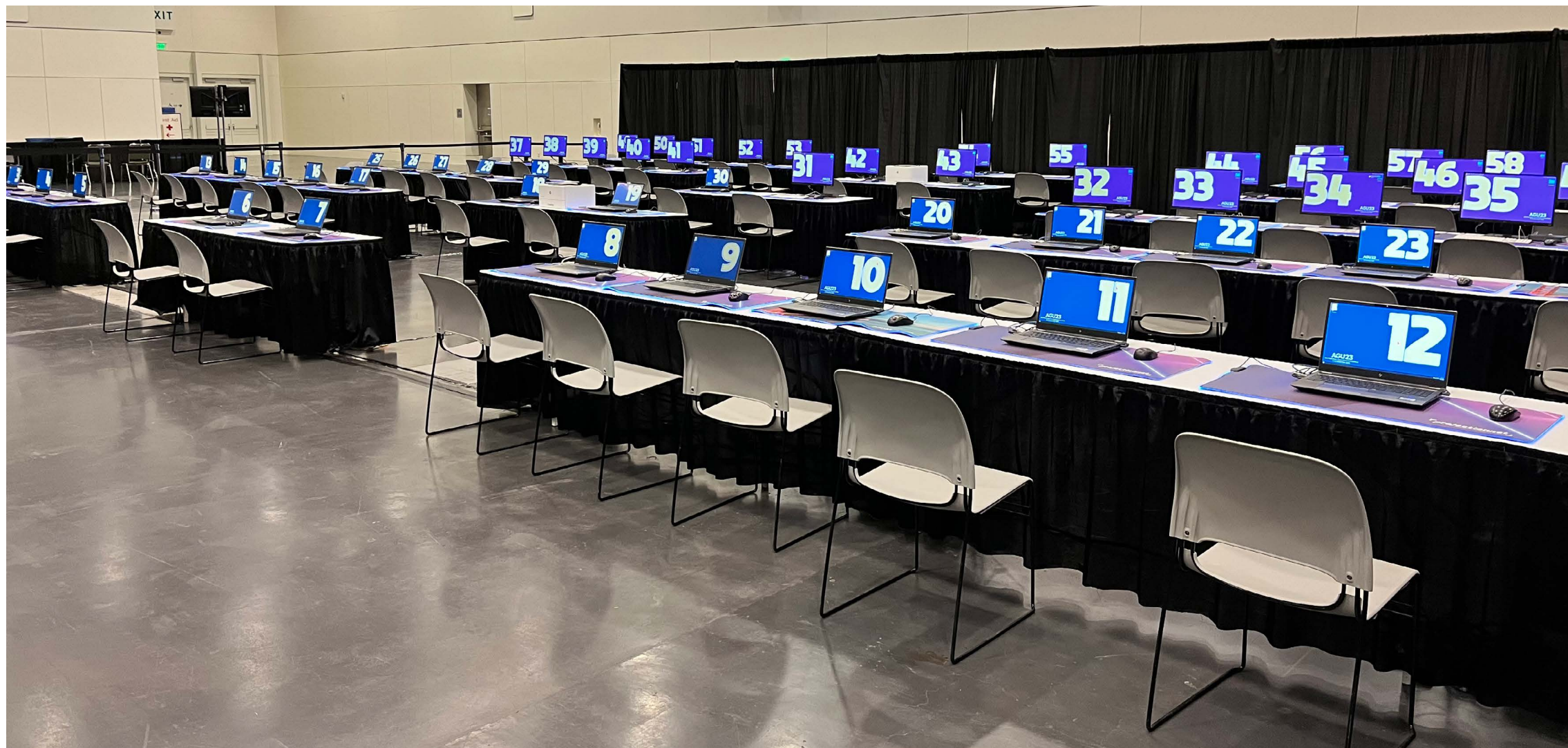


Website alternative sponsorship ads

- If your organization allows, your sponsors' ads don't have to be limited to your event website. Your presentation management upload site or on-site presentation launcher screen may also have sponsorship opportunities for splash screens, banner ads or other branded sponsor content.

Audience engagement tools

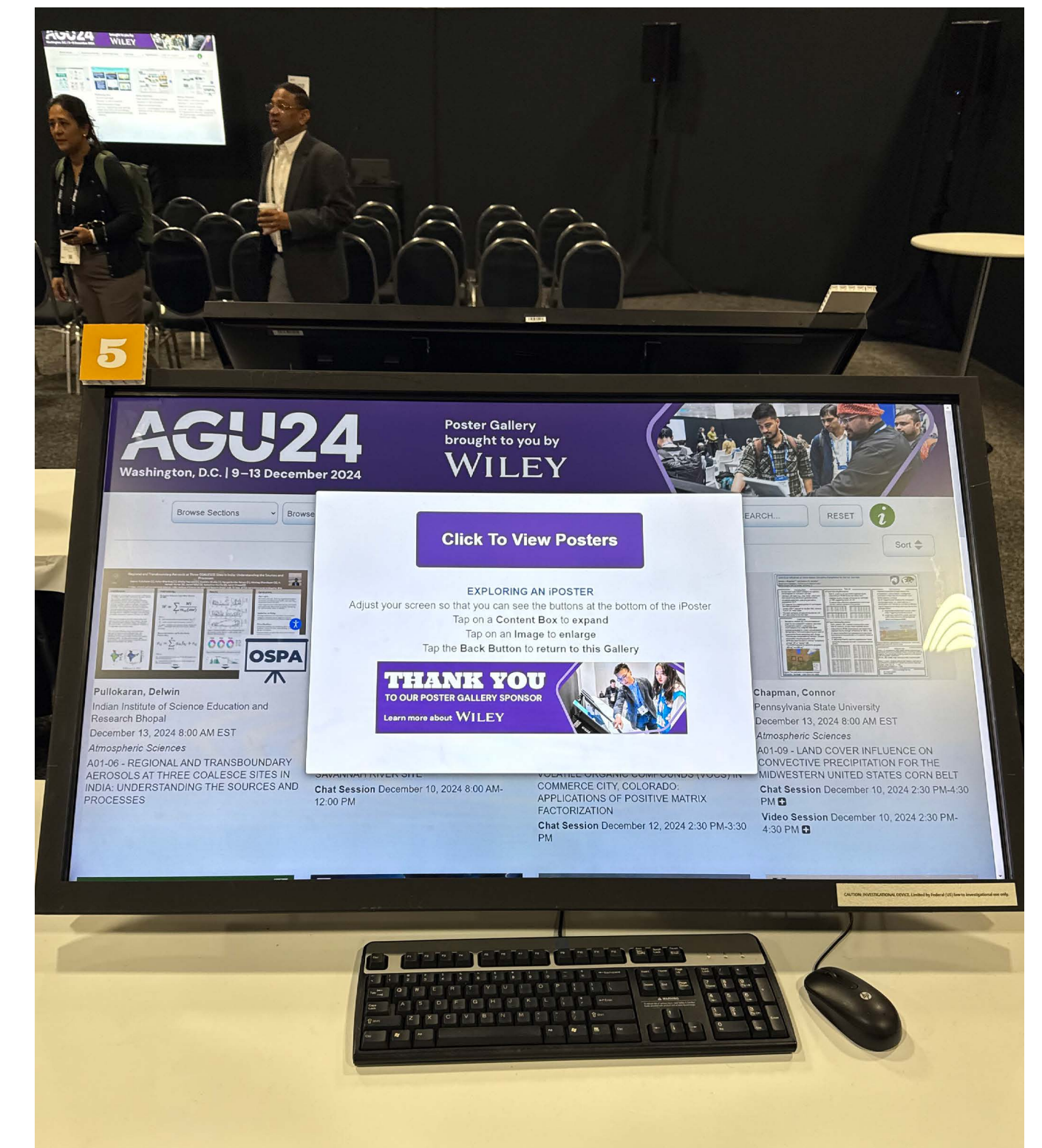
- Integrate sponsor branding into audience engagement tools used during sessions; for example, "This live Q&A is powered by [Sponsor Name]"



Content capture and live streaming

- Looking to keep the momentum going after the event? Turn recorded sessions or key topics into a sponsor-supported webinar series, allowing sponsors to stay connected with your audience year-round. This not only creates additional value for sponsors, but also reinforces your association as a hub for timely, expert-driven content.
- Sponsors can be featured in:
 - Video "wraps"/skins around slides and video
 - Intro/outro bumpers
 - Hosting pages for session replays

Many tech-enabled opportunities — like podcast recordings, livestreams, and video interviews — give sponsors valuable content they can use in their own marketing after the event. It's not just visibility during the meeting, it's reusable assets that extend their ROI long after it's over.



Measuring Success

When we're looking at the evolving role of sponsorships, we cannot overlook one of the most critical components: measurement. Every sponsor will want to understand the return on investment (ROI) of any opportunity. It's also important to ensure that the sponsor's goals align with the association's vision. If there isn't clear alignment, success won't be possible for either organization.

Dahlia El Gazzar is excited about all of the new and evolving opportunities for planners to connect value-driving event components: generating additional sponsorship revenue and delivering personalized experiences for attendees.

We all know that measurement is unique to each organization. For example, some may measure booth traffic while another tracks leads generated. Conversations between associations and sponsor organizations should make space for these nuances; teams must work to come to mutually-agreed upon metrics and be willing to adjust over time if necessary.

"The role of technology at events today cannot be overstated. It can serve as an enabler for creating content, enhancing design, and providing data analytics for measuring engagement. Now, organizations can use AI-enhanced

platforms, such as data tracking tools, to measure the success of sponsorships. With innovation happening so quickly, it's important that teams stay informed on the latest and best ways to demonstrate ROI." Dahlia El Gazzar, tech evangelist + idea igniteur, DAHLIA+Agency. "We are entering the era of vibe eventing, where it's agile, personal, and more measurable than ever before. It's how you will create mind stamping events going forward."



HBA 2024 - DAHLIA+Agency Brand Bar + AI Accelerator Lab

"Look for opportunities to create more meaningful experiences at your event for attendees, while also connecting sponsors to their key audience. When they are no longer 'attending a conference' and, instead, living the vision you've brought to life, the value for everyone—the association, sponsors, and attendees—increases dramatically." Dahlia El Gazzar, tech evangelist + idea igniteur, DAHLIA+Agency. "Your ultimate experience goal here is to see if their Eyes Light Up - ELU is your most important KPI when it comes to your activations. This term coined by Wes Kao lends itself to everything you do when it comes to events."

"It has to be a fit for both sides. I am always asking, are we being compensated fairly; are we a good fit for our sponsors; and are we renewing vs. selling? When we get to the point where a sponsor is able to justify their investment of time, resources, and money year-over-year, we have done our job of ensuring they have the right opportunity to connect with their audience."

Jason Keith, Chief Development and Operations Officer, American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons



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No matter the kind or size of organization, the role of sponsorships will continue to evolve. The teams that recognize—and create—new opportunities for more meaningful engagement will be better positioned to thrive in this evolving landscape.

To brainstorm ideas for your next meeting or design your next sponsor playbook, contact us at **info@projection.com**

check us out: **projection.com**

follow us on **LinkedIn**