



The Complete Guide to a Better Congress Experience

There's a better way to get more value from congress planning and attendance – learn tools, tips, and strategies to do more with the insights you gather at major events.

UPDATED FOR 2023

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Introduction

Medical congresses are valuable venues for sharing information about scientific advances and gathering data to make business decisions. These events are crucial for keeping up with the latest in life science industry standards and best practices – and live presentations plus ongoing discussions with other opinion leaders are paramount to a clearer understanding of drug development and launch issues, new clinical data, and patient treatment.



There are intriguing new possibilities on the horizon for medical congresses. In the past few years, technology ushered in new and more convenient ways of participating, tools to monitor trending conversations, and the possibility of acting on insights faster than ever. But life science teams are struggling with challenges, too: the proliferation and speed of data, an influx of information from multiple channels, competition, and the pressure to make an immediate and significant impact at or soon after launching a product that took years to bring to market.

Are hybrid congresses the new standard?

In 2022, JAMA reported that while scientific consensus agreed the industry could safely reestablish in-person scientific conferences, there are many arguments to support hybrid conferences as the new standard. Among them: virtual congress technology is improving; the number of participants often increases with hybrid conferences; hybrid options help junior academics, persons with a career break, and attendees from low- and middle-income countries; and less travel will reduce the carbon footprint and energy use.

– [JAMA Network](#)



A brief, pandemic-driven experiment with virtual medical congresses only underscored the importance of in-person interaction. In a [Reuters Health](#) survey of medical affairs professionals, nearly a third of respondents said external stakeholders responded poorly to all-virtual medical congresses. However, just a tiny minority of the group – 2.2% – believed that congresses won't continue to have some virtual elements.

What do these seemingly conflicted results tell us? Simply put, there's a growing shift in how life science organizations view technology and its role in their day-to-day work.

How can life science teams capitalize on a more tech-enabled congress experience within the framework of an in-person event? And how can these changes make every aspect of congress planning and execution more targeted and valuable?



HCPs and the shift to social

One of the lasting impacts of COVID-19 restrictions is HCPs' relationship with social media and other online networking forums. **The pandemic drove an 81% increase in HCP use of social media, and now, 70% of HCPs spend more than one hour of their workday online**, with half of this time used to aid clinical decision-making. The same percentage of HCPs report using social media for professional purposes.

– [ePharma Physician/DRG Taking the Pulse](#)

Challenges of the traditional congress model



Ironically, congress planning is a complex process made more complex by tools intended to simplify it. Congresses are logistics-heavy, and technologies designed to enhance communication – email, text messaging, video conferencing – only contribute to the hectic, multi-channel nature of congress planning.

Managing multiple pre-event input streams – including identifying who should attend, creating assets like posters and other educational materials, and planning the day-to-day coverage of important sessions and one-to-one meetings with key opinion leaders – takes place alongside more tactical planning such as travel logistics and internal coordination.

Once on-site at a congress, teams are spread thin trying to take in as much scientific exchange as possible. There might be time for colleagues to come together and share what they've learned, but typically these efforts fall by the wayside in favor of networking opportunities and the crush of congress activities. Post-congress, the story is much the same – as HCPs and peers wrap up meetings and plan to head home, the all-important capture of insights is a fragmented process that sometimes takes weeks or months to complete.

The future of medical congresses? Hybrid and tech-enabled

The mega medical congresses of the past are expected to make way for more virtual, focused, and hybrid physical /digital events, and will see growth in technologies such as artificial intelligence, chatbots, virtual rooms, and learning platforms.

– [Deloitte](#)

What's the impact when pharma teams can't improve their congress planning approach, which often takes place among disparate teams in a variety of disconnected systems?

- Missed opportunities to propel business strategy
- Failure to increase speed to market against competition
- Lack of improvement in patient outcomes

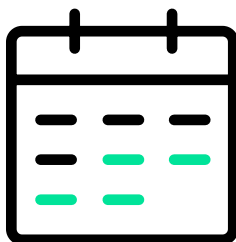
A better way: the insights management model

The key benefits of applying robust insights management strategy to medical congress participation include:



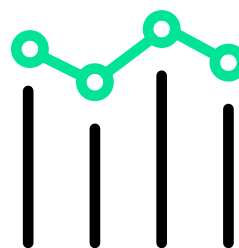
Better preparation

Using technology to monitor social platforms ahead of the event can help teams focus on what they want to discuss – and with who – during the event. Within an insights management platform, tech like natural language processing helps reduce manual analysis and identify trending topics. Teams can also use asynchronous engagement applications before, during, and after congress events to set goals, share impressions, and build consensus.



Logistical advantages

Virtual capabilities add flexibility to the agenda if last-minute additions are needed. Teams can see observations gathered in near real-time, even if they're not onsite. And if asynchronous engagement is used during a congress, teams will likely get more information by collecting it in one convenient online place rather than sifting through the chaos of email chains and text messages post-event.



Measurability

Technology provides a way for organizations to measure not just attendance – who showed up to which meetings – but engagement and effectiveness. Using asynchronous and live virtual interactions before, during, and after congress events helps teams capture more insight and feedback in the moment, while thoughts and impressions are fresh in attendees' minds.

Expert opinion: Content and convenience will shape the congress experience

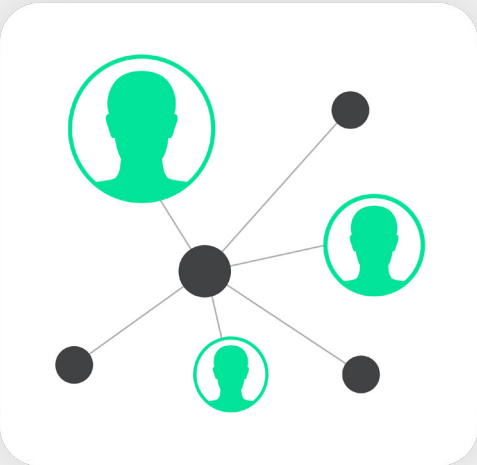
Christoph Schmidt, former Global Head of Commercial Excellence at Actelion Pharmaceuticals, cites research that shows the information-seeking preferences of HCPs have changed, with many now demanding content in a format, on a channel, and at a time that is convenient to them.

“In the future, [congresses] will be on a much smaller scale with broadcasts over social media and information sharing through different channels.”

– [Reuters Events](#)

But these factors aren't the only compelling reason pharma teams should change their approach to congress participation. Drug and device developers are dealing with a bigger challenge: the volume of insights from multiple channels, which need to be organized, interpreted, and shared.

Advancements in different types of technology enable life science teams to approach congress planning in a way that prioritizes insights management. These technologies include:




Network analytics

Maps the strengths and volume of connections between HCPs. This technology looks at topics that matter to medical affairs teams and examines what's known as the invisible college – a network of like-minded peers and experts that aren't affiliated with any single organization or authority, and are motivated by the search for knowledge and scientific discovery.


Social listening


Tracking social media platforms for mentions and conversations about your disease community, then analyzing them for insights to discover opportunities.






Ali Chiu, MD
12:34 PM





Richard Grant
8:50 AM



Asynchronous virtual engagement

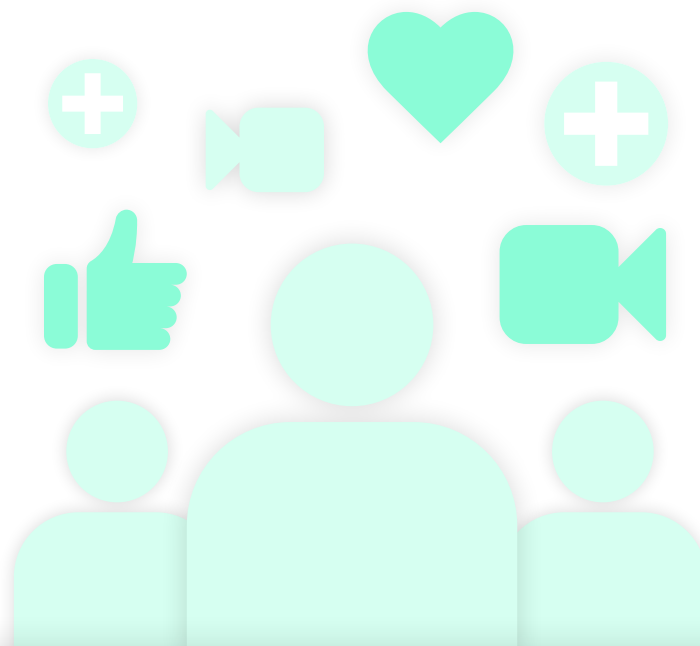
Anytime, or asynchronous engagement, is similar to an online university format where a discussion is available to participants for a set period of time. Interaction takes place on a web-based platform over a period of days or weeks.

Life science-trained natural language processing

In a medical affairs context, NLP technology can break apart the text of collected insights and identify meaningful concepts that can be tracked, flagged, grouped, or otherwise organized. When organizations can use this technology on a high volume of insights gathered from experts, they can more quickly identify trends and concepts that help drive strategy and enable faster, more accurate decision-making.

"Product A has been well tolerated in younger infants, but older infants have had lots of safety scares. Families were scarred by seeing their children so sick, and HCP feels they can't get over this. Possible negative community feelings on Product A."

By integrating these technologies throughout the congress process – before, during, and after – it's possible to capture more insights from more sources and put them to better use. Here's how a medical affairs team, for example, might apply these technologies to the different phases of congress planning and execution.



PRE-CONGRESS

- Monitor social channels to map key people and trends. Understand prevailing sentiment and identify experts to meet during the event.
- Ideate, create, and confirm abstract text in an asynchronous platform with document annotation. Everyone contributes when they're able, so every voice is heard.

DURING THE CONGRESS

- Use social listening to track near real-time impressions and discussions. Publish content that drives engagement with digital opinion leaders and other experts.
- Set up an asynchronous congress huddle during the annual meeting – no complicated back-and-forth scheduling for 15 distracted minutes in a noisy conference room.
- Capitalize on event momentum and hold a live virtual advisory board during the congress. Use asynchronous pre- and post-meeting elements to make the most of everyone's time.

POST-CONGRESS

- Continue to monitor social channels to track take-aways shared by congress attendees. Analyze social media impact before, during, and after the event and build a strategy to deepen opinion leader relationships.
- Build on post-congress buzz with asynchronous and live virtual sessions to regroup, react, and share important insights gleaned from KOLs during the event.
- Establish an online resource center, so congress abstracts, posters, and videos are always accessible to internal stakeholders.

Now what? The challenge of **translating insights into action**

In an online poll, 40% of medical affairs professionals indicated their biggest challenge in medical congress strategy and execution is synthesizing data and information obtained during the congress event. – [Reuters Events](#)

How your peers are using technology in congress planning

Life science organizations are already using technology to be more strategic about how they plan, participate in, and maximize the value of congresses. Here's a few real-world examples of how technology is enabling a more insights-focused approach.

BEFORE: Congress social monitoring to capture real-time insights, ID new experts

A medical affairs team wanted to [gather insights from a major medical congress](#). Their objectives included:

- 1 Identify key opinion leaders posting about the congress
- 2 Monitor disease community chatter related to the congress
- 3 Monitor congress chatter around 30+ keywords related to both the company and its competitors

The team used Within3's social listening tools to monitor chatter from critical stakeholders and other experts pre- and post-congress. They successfully identified new expert voices and captured real-time insights, discovering that many of their target KOLs were highly active online and frequently engaged with congress-related topics.

Rather than manually monitoring blogs, forums, and other major platforms simultaneously while making sense of the multiple information streams, using Within3's congress monitor allowed the medical affairs team to identify which topics, trials, and sessions garnered the most online attention during the event.

Based on the congress-related conversations, the medical affairs team was able to:

- ✓ Discover 4 new expert voices
- ✓ Identify trending topics during the event and gauge which trials and sessions generated the most buzz
- ✓ Determine how online conversations differed from what was happening on the conference floor
- ✓ Understand overall sentiment around data releases from their organization and a competitor
- ✓ Learn how HCPs were discussing the impact of a specific trial on the disease community, providing unscripted and unbiased expert opinions

DURING: Gaining HCP insights at a medical congress

A medical affairs team wanted to [capture physician feedback](#) about information presented at a medical congress. The physicians, all specialists in variations of a specific type of disease, would be asked to provide input based on their observations at the congress. The team wanted to understand:

- 1 Current treatment practices and challenges
- 2 Models of care
- 3 Emerging data about disease variants

The medical affairs team used an asynchronous platform to collect information from the physicians daily during the congress. The team set up three congress huddle sessions in the platform, in addition to a post-congress advisory board session. Physicians were invited to one or more huddle sessions based on specialization in different disease variants, and all of the physicians were invited to participate in the post-congress session. During the congress, the medical affairs team uploaded copies of posters at the event, and the physicians answered questions about the poster presentations. This approach did not require the physicians to attend a live meeting during the event, yet still allowed the team to collect insights in near real-time. The post-congress session enabled physicians to provide final thoughts even as they traveled home and returned to their regular schedule.

Key results included:



Increased convenience for the physicians



Higher volume and quality of insights



Last-minute attendance changes did not preclude the ability to give feedback

AFTER: Online resource center for congress highlights

A medical affairs team needed a way to [share information generated at medical congress](#) events with conference attendees and internal personnel. Objectives included:

- 1 Provide access to posters, abstracts, and symposium recordings in one authoritative location
- 2 Share data and news post-congress with all internal attendees and interested personnel
- 3 Create a space to share scientific information

The team established an online resource center where congress attendees and other internal personnel could obtain information after congress events. Several events are held each year, and the resource center provides the flexibility to organize and present information for each congress. When there is new activity in the resource center directly following a congress event, members receive an email to alert them to the availability of new resources. The medical affairs team uses the email digest to spread awareness and learnings to internal personnel.

As a result, the team successfully used the resource center for several congress events, including ISPAD, EASD, and ADA. Posters, daily summaries, videos, and other types of content are easily accessible within a single resource center.

Conclusion and key takeaways

There's change underway for medical congresses, and life science teams can set themselves up for success by applying insights management technology to traditional ways of working. While technology cannot replace the in-person networking opportunities that hold so much value, it can enrich the congress experience and improve the decision-making processes that follow.

To take the first steps toward a more modern approach to congress planning, start with the following:

- Identify processes before, during, and after congress events that pose challenges around collecting and using insights. These are your opportunities – where can technology eliminate manual processing, guesswork, and complexity?
- Determine whether or not your organization already has access to insights management technology, including social listening and asynchronous virtual engagement. If not, identify vendors with solutions that can be onboarded quickly.
- Work to cultivate relationships with like-minded colleagues who are open to trying a new approach to congress activities and form a task force or center of excellence that drives innovation.



ABOUT WITHIN3

Within3 invented a better way for life science companies to get deeper insights and make faster decisions across the product development lifecycle. With the power to identify the right experts, effectively engage them, and quickly obtain actionable information, life science teams can close the insight gap and drive projects forward with confidence. Our insights management platform gives stakeholders the freedom to collaborate anytime, anywhere, on any device, plus practical tools to foster meaningful discussions, co-create and edit documentation, and rely on the power of AI to achieve faster and more accurate decision-making. With a dedicated client success team on every implementation, most Within3 projects achieve 100% stakeholder participation. To learn more and request a needs assessment and demo, visit www.within3.com.