

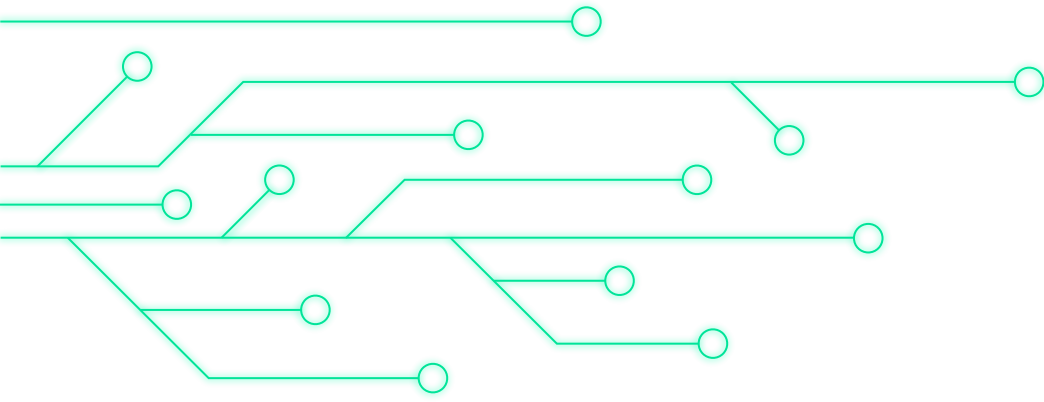
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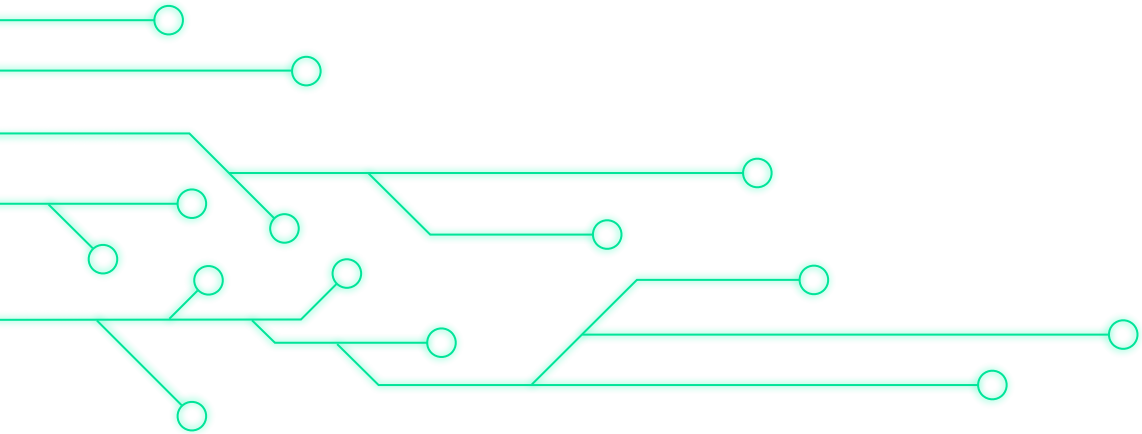


# Maximizing the Value of Medical Congresses: *A Guide for Medical Affairs*

The new, tech-enabled approach to congress planning adds value to medical conference attendance – before, during, and after the event.



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# Introduction

For medical affairs teams, medical congresses are valuable venues for sharing information essential to the development of life science advances. It's important for medical affairs to use their time at these events wisely and gain enough information to make business decisions. These events are considered 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 issues around drug development and launch, new data, and patient treatment.



But the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted this traditional model, at first causing [major events](#) to be postponed as organizations held out hope that the crisis would quickly pass. When it became clear that travel limitations and restrictions on large gatherings would last well into the following years, the life science industry began to explore new options for conducting high-quality, credible scientific exchange.

All-virtual congresses held some appeal for certain audiences, including participants who were unable or preferred not to travel. Registration costs for virtual attendance were typically much lower, expanding the pool of attendees. And Q&A opportunities and other discussions held via chat felt more welcoming for people who might be reluctant to speak up in a face-to-face setting. But despite these positives, most attendees maintained a preference for in-person medical congress events.

## Speaking out, via the chat window

In 2020, the Scoliosis Research Society held its annual meeting during its originally scheduled time – but reconfigured the event to offer up to four hours of virtual-only content each day. Sessions garnered strong reviews and had high levels of participation via the chat option.

In fact, chat activity reflected a  
**10-fold increase**  
over previous years in audience questions  
during each session. - [HBR](#)



Industry research supports this: in a [Reuters Health](#) survey of medical affairs professionals, nearly a third of respondents said external stakeholders had responded poorly to all-virtual medical congresses. However, in spite of this apparently lukewarm reception, just a tiny minority of the group – 2.2% – think that congresses won't continue to have some virtual elements. This reflects a growing shift in how many medical affairs organizations are approaching how they work throughout the year, including congress planning, attendance, and follow-up.

How can medical affairs teams retain the advantages of virtual elements – convenience, inclusion, the democratization of scientific discussion – 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?



### The virtual congress contradiction

How do people really feel about virtual medical congresses?

In 2021, IPCAA reported that **92% of HCPs would likely or definitely attend a congress virtually** that they would not have considered attending in person – but that given the choice, **55% of HCPs stated they prefer to attend a congress live.**

Confusing as it may seem, the key takeaways for life science organizations are that virtual congress elements are an opportunity to expand their audience and that HCPs appreciate having a choice of how to attend.



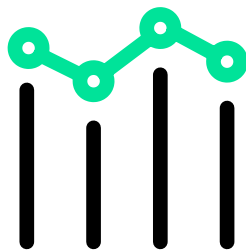
# A modern approach: the tech-supported, insights management congress model

Medical affairs organizations learned a lot from the pandemic-driven shift to virtual congresses, and many of these lessons will stick. Key benefits of an all-virtual or hybrid virtual congress event include:



## Logistical advantages

For attendees, the ability to participate virtually may make it more likely they can attend events they would otherwise skip. Virtual capabilities add flexibility to the agenda if last-minute additions are needed. And if asynchronous elements are used during a congress, teams are likely to 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

Virtual elements provide 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.



## Reduced risk of disruption

To varying extents, the uncertainty of the pandemic will continue for the foreseeable future. Virtual elements of live events are not affected by travel shutdowns or concerns of contagion in group gatherings while variants continue to emerge and countries await higher vaccination rates. And while everyone would like to put the restrictions and uncertainty of the past few years behind them, the fact is that things can change quickly. Offering virtual participation in some congress activities provides a backup plan should in-person meetings be curtailed again.

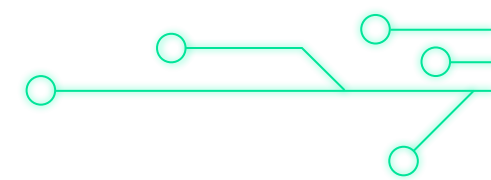
## Expert opinion: Content and convenience will shape the congress experience

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.”

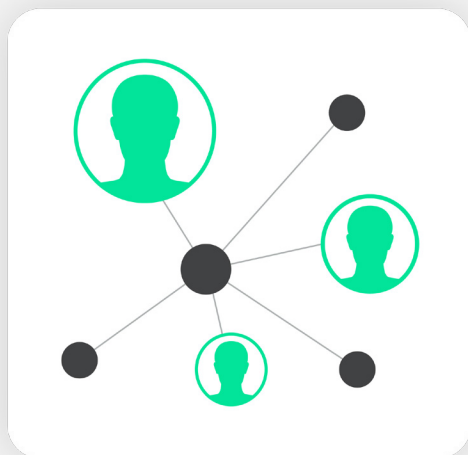
– [Reuters Events](#)





But these factors aren't the only compelling reason that medical affairs organizations will change their approach to congress participation in the years to come. Drug and device developers are dealing with a much bigger challenge: the volume of insights coming from multiple channels, which need to be organized, interpreted and shared.

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



### Network analytics

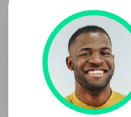
Maps the strengths and volume of connections between HCPs. This technology looks at topics that matter to medical affairs teams and examines what's known as the invisible college – a network of like-minded peers and experts that aren't affiliated with any single organization or authority, and are motivated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

### Social listening

Tracking social media platforms for mentions and conversations related to 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 be used to break apart the text of collected insights and identify meaningful concepts that can be tracked, flagged, grouped, or otherwise organized. When organizations have the ability to 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.

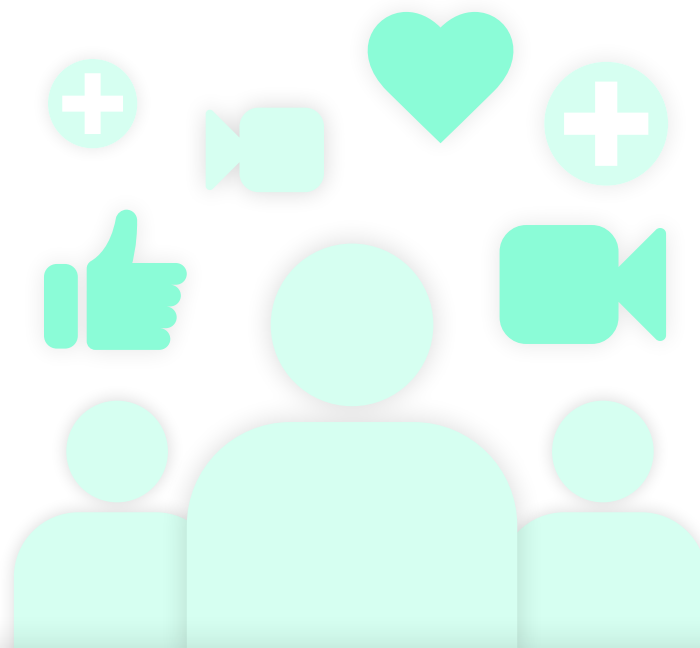
“Product A has been well tolerated in younger infants, but older infants have had lots of safety scares. Families were scarred by seeing their children so sick, and HCP feels they can't get over this. Possible negative community feelings on Product A.”

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. Keep reading to learn how a medical affairs team 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.



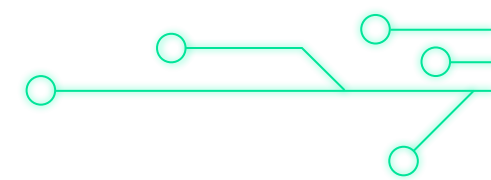
## POST-CONGRESS

- 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](#)





# In the real world: how your medical affairs peers are using technology in congress planning

Medical affairs 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.

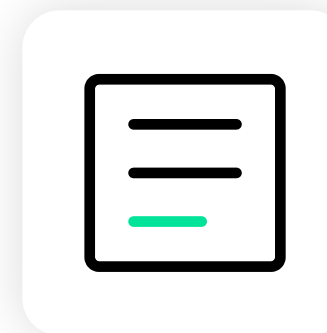
## BEFORE: Virtual review of congress resources

Prior to a medical congress, a medical affairs team wanted to get feedback from experts who frequently attend such events. The team's goals were:

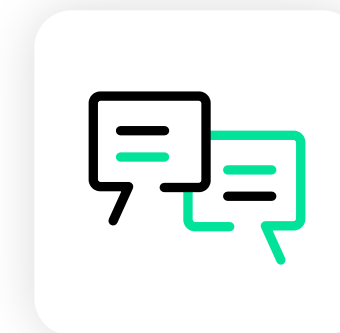
- 1 Seek feedback on disease-state medical content
- 2 Pursue advice on educational gaps that can be addressed in the context of a medical booth
- 3 Understand the top resources that HCPs are recommending

The team used an asynchronous virtual engagement platform so advisors could log in over a period of time and contribute their thoughts whenever it was most convenient for them. The client kicked off the session with two ice-breaker questions so advisors could get to know each other while getting used to the platform features. Advisors viewed resources like infographics, videos, an interactive activity, and an external website and provided feedback.

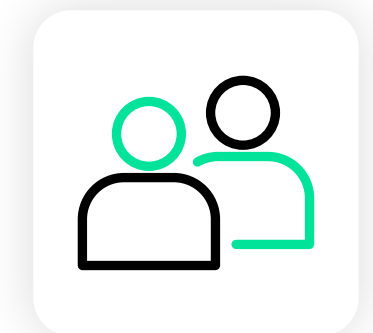
The medical affairs team got robust feedback on the conference booth resources and was able to make critical updates to the materials. Key advantages of the asynchronous approach included:



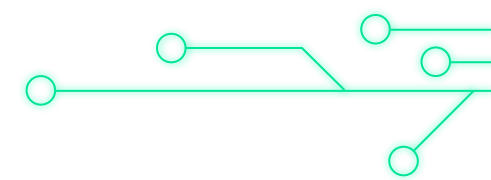
More feedback in a much shorter timeframe as compared to other methods



Great interaction between the advisors and the team, even without an in-person element



Ability to identify the most active participants for re-engagement on other projects



## DURING: Gaining HCP insights during a medical congress

A medical affairs team wanted to capture physician feedback about information being 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 virtually collect information from the physicians on a daily basis 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 of the 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 presented 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.

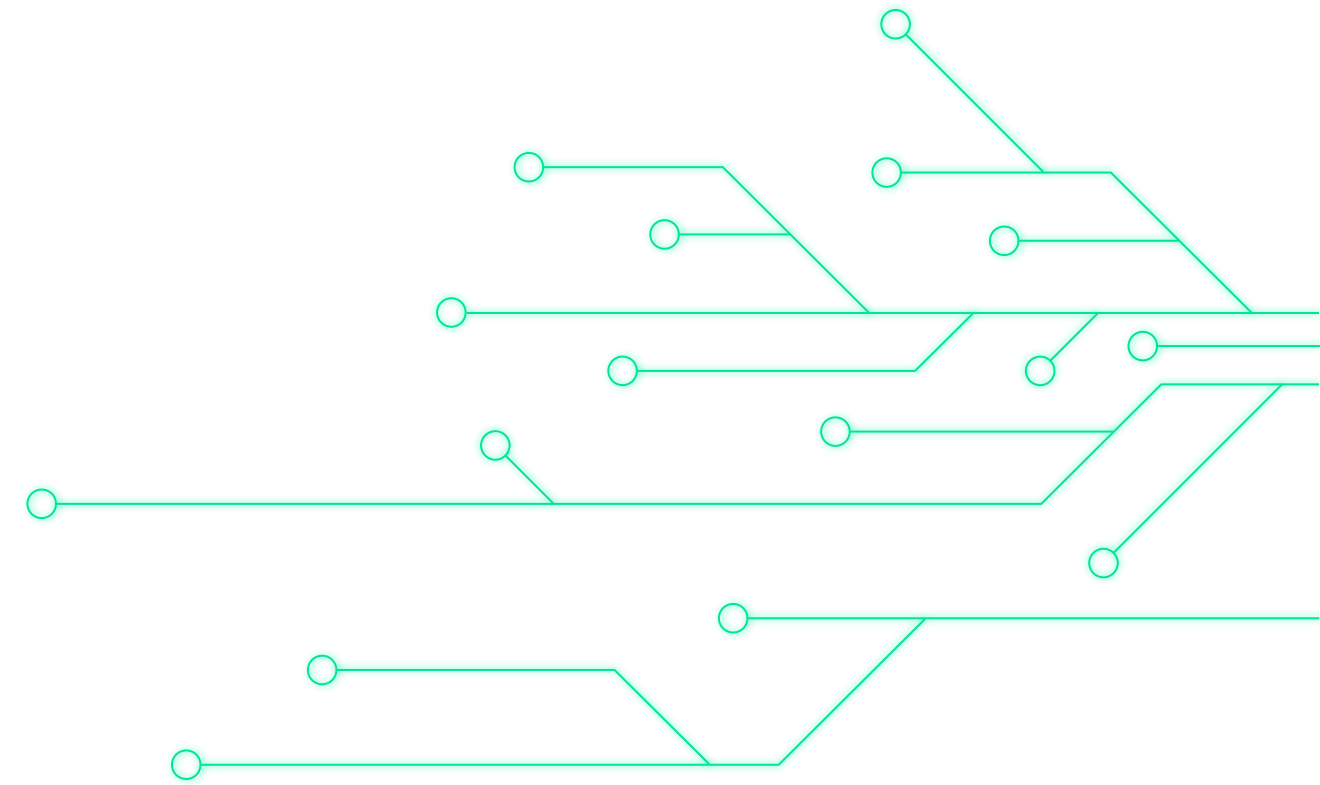
As a result, the team successfully used the resource center for several congress events, including ISPAD, EASD, and ADA. Posters, daily summaries, videos, and other types of content are easily accessible within a single resource center.

# Conclusion and key takeaways

COVID-19 irrevocably changed how humans interact with each other, and many of our new virtual habits are likely to stick. Medical affairs organizations must adapt to this new reality – a reality in which digital capabilities increasingly augment traditional ways of working and interacting. Virtual elements and technological tools don't need to replace the in-person networking opportunities that hold so much value – but they can enrich them, and provide a better way to use them strategically.

To take the first steps toward a more modern approach to congress planning for medical affairs, 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?
- 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.



## 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](http://www.within3.com).



