



ICCA Association Success Story

The European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology



About EAACI

The European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology's Annual Congresses are worldwide known as the largest platform for healthcare professionals and researchers to share, present and discuss the latest updates in the specialty. Usually taking place in big, buzzing venues, they attract over 8'000 delegates onsite and more than 1'500 abstracts, around a wide-scoped scientific programme.

EAACI Annual Congress 2020 - Digital

As the COVID-19 pandemic impacted individuals, society, and the entire world, we found ourselves seeking solutions to adapt to the new challenges faced. Preparations for the EAACI Annual Congress usually intensify in the springtime, as the event takes place in the summer. Most organisations in 2020 were cancelling their physical meetings due to uncertainty and tight restrictions.

At the frightening peak of the pandemic, EAACI swiftly switched its Annual Congress format from the foreshadowed venue in London, to a fully digital event. It was the first time in the organisation's history that delegates were asked to attend the congress from behind their screens. With just a couple of months to set everything in place, this came with fast-paced technological efforts, to ensure that the digital congress platform, developed in collaboration with providers CYIM and Quanti, was smooth and user-friendly. Speakers had to get acquainted with recording their lectures in a virtual studio, and participants needed to be properly informed about how to navigate the digital event.

The 2020 Digital Congress turned out to be a success with over 8'500 participants, and an even more global participation than usual, as the new format meant that delegates could join without having to travel to a physical venue from afar. The digital format also allowed great perks such as a live section for delegates to view lectures in real time, but also an on-demand section, where these could be re-watched at everyone's convenience, in any time zone. One of the strongest aspects of medical events is the networking made onsite. This was a task that had to be kept in mind while developing the digital offer, so EAACI made sure to include several virtual tools for social interaction, bringing in gamification concepts to enhance interpersonal connection.

EAACI Annual Congress 2021 - Hybrid

As 2021 kicked in, it was clear that the pandemic was going to persist for much longer than expected. After one year of incredible strain in hospitals, clinical practices, and labs for EAACI's healthcare professionals and researchers, everyone was craving a bustling event, to share the latest discoveries in the community. Aware of national restrictions and ensuring the full respect of health and safety measures, EAACI organised its very first hybrid congress in Krakow, Poland, and online. This time, delegates could choose whether to attend in person or virtually, in a format that essentially catered to everyone's wishes.

The ICE Krakow venue in Poland accommodated 1'500 participants on site, while another 6'000 signed into the digital platform from the comfort of their homes. By this time, EAACI was versed in both offers, having spent the months before tweaking the platform used, to create a seamless link between the two forms of participation.

What were the challenges faced along the way?

Challenges included unexpected changes in speakers' availability or their ability to travel, the implementation of testing facilities, sanitation and strict COVID-19 monitoring onsite, and the creation of strong back-up scenarios in case of changes to regulations. Both the physical and digital components of the event were executed efficiently, thanks to strong technological partnerships and active communication prior to and during the event. Participants were highly pleased with the congress, which once again opened possibilities to attend even more globally, thereby enriching the scientific programme and interdisciplinary dimension of the event.

What are some lesson learnt?

Being pushed to modernize and digitalise quickly, EAACI has become even stronger as an organisation. Lessons learnt from the Digital and Hybrid congresses of 2020 and 2021 have led to a ripple wave of innovation in other projects for the Academy. For instance, the creation of a brand-new e-learning platform with up-to-date content and assessments for members at any stage of their careers, where courses and CME accreditation can be achieved virtually. Likewise, the digitalisation of the organisation's smaller topical focused meetings and allergy schools.

What was the wider impact for the association?

As a continuation, this year EAACI has planned a Hybrid Congress again, which will take place in Prague, Czech Republic, and online from 1-3 July 2022. The motto corresponds to the current EAACI research priority: the One Health Approach, which postulates that the health of our environment, animals, and plants are deeply linked to human health. The Congress will involve three days of deep knowledge sharing, world-class expert lectures, and the possibility to brainstorm on these linkages, priorities, and challenges as an interdisciplinary community.

The One Health motto, which shows the importance of linkages, is the perfect backdrop for the success stories of EAACI in the two past years. In times when interconnection was limited, we realised the vast potential that lies within alternative modes of connecting. In this sense, the digital era provides incredible opportunities for positive change and the revolutionising of best practices.

Watch the video



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