



Top Five Global Pharmaceutical Company Conducts Industry's First Virtual Poster Session In ProtoSphere



CUSTOMER SUCCESS STORY

"Virtualizing our poster session was as close as we could get to physically being together, without having to commit all the time, money, and preparatory work required to set up a conference at an outside location."

~IT Senior Analyst

Situation

Every year, a top five global pharmaceutical company holds a three-day technology symposium for about 500 of its R&D scientists and vendors. The conference is considered a "premiere event" for technology sharing and collaboration among internal employees, and provides a means for vendors to promote new technologies. It spans three of the company's locations.

Poster sessions, a traditional pharmaceutical industry approach, drive the event. Large posters blend text and graphics to visually promote researchers' work. The posters efficiently communicate new research as attendees walk by. Unlike PowerPoint presentations, attendees can stand and study the posters at their own pace.

They can also attend formal presentations around the posters. And they can engage in side discussions, where scientists chat and collaborate to learn about new technologies, new techniques, and how to apply what they've learned to laboratory projects and business areas.

Direct and indirect production costs typically topped six figures. The company and vendors had to coordinate the schedules of approximately 500 attendees. They also had to absorb the loss of normal productivity (e.g., scientists were traveling, attending, or exhibiting instead of discovering new products or managing projects).

Solution Overview

CUSTOMER NAME

A top five global pharmaceutical company

INDUSTRY

Pharmaceutical

BUSINESS SITUATION

Every year, a top five global pharmaceutical company holds a three-day technology symposium for about 500 of its R&D scientists and vendors. Poster sessions, a traditional pharmaceutical industry approach, drive the event. However, facing six-figure costs and ongoing logistical challenges, several of the company's employees requested alternatives to the traditional symposium.



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PRODUCTS

ProtoSphere

SOLUTION

The company's team developed a use case and partnered with ProtonMedia to create the pharmaceutical industry's first virtual technology symposium. Built in ProtonMedia's ProtoSphere, the project fleshed out the functionality, business value, and strategic potential of virtual poster sessions that accurately replicated the real-world symposium experience.

BENEFITS

- Behind-the-firewall support ensured secure access to proprietary corporate information.
- Over 80% of users said their experience *was the same or better* than a real-world conference.
- Over 80% said their knowledge transfer *was the same or better* than a real-world conference.
- Almost 60% said the virtual poster session *was better* than a real-world conference.
- Estimated five-figure reduction in production costs.
- Eliminated travel time and costs associated with annual conference.

Solution

The ongoing costs and logistical challenges motivated several of the company's employees to request alternatives to the traditional technology symposium. Many options were considered for a proof-of-concept (POC), including teleconferences, webinars, interactive video, computer-based training, chat rooms, forums, Web meetings, and virtual spaces.

Analysis by the company's IT team determined that only a virtual meeting environment promised the communication, collaboration, and knowledge transfer benefits of the symposium in general, and poster sessions specifically. But the technology was unproven.

The company's team developed a use case and partnered with ProtonMedia to create the pharmaceutical industry's first virtual technology symposium. Built in ProtonMedia's ProtoSphere, the project would flesh out the functionality, business value, and strategic potential of virtual poster sessions that accurately replicate the real-world symposium experience.

The design requirement called for two large conference halls where posters could be presented to 50 people; the ability to approach and listen to a presenter speak on a topic while reviewing their poster; and ongoing access to the environment and all knowledge assets before, during, and after the event.

The design also required an area where attendees could chat without interrupting presenters; private rooms where attendees and presenters could talk one-on-one; tables and chairs for people to congregate; and sufficient space for people to stand.

Through an iterative process anchored by weekly progress and technical meetings, it took three company staff and two ProtonMedia teammates 12 weeks to design, build, and launch a secure virtual conference center for scientific collaboration. In addition to the physical environment, the team defined and implemented how people would move about and interact.

The resulting immersive space simulated the look and feel of the actual symposium exterior and interior with exceptional precision, including floor plans, wall coverings, furniture, lighting, rooms, and so on. It would be immediately familiar to anyone who had attended the company's technical symposium in the past.



Experience

The company launched a three-hour poster session in the ProtoSphere environment. There were 20 posters, eight presenters, and 46 attendees logged in from various company locations using standard PCs. Running securely behind the company's firewall, ProtoSphere authenticated users and allowed access based on rights, roles, and zones. The environment was active seconds after logging in.

The participants had not used a virtual workplace before. The environment was available in advance of the poster sessions, so participants could acclimate themselves beforehand. They learned how to use their headsets; mute/unmute their mics; move around using their arrow keys; use human gestures; interact with people, posters, and documents; and so on.

A moderator kicked off the event to review the agenda and describe how it would run. The 54 scientists moved about, interacted, and gestured using their virtual bodies (avatars), all of which looked and sounded like their real-world counterparts. They talked publically or privately using voice (VoIP) and text chat. They milled about the rooms, reviewed posters, asked presenters questions, and talked amongst themselves.

The posters simulated the large 5' x 4' sheets used in the traditional symposium. To simulate their full effect, they could be enlarged or reduced to make it easy for scientists to study them. Scientists could also download the posters for offline access or to share with teammates not at the event.

After the virtual poster session ended, the ProtoSphere environment remained available for ongoing access, discussions, meetings, and collaboration—something that's simply not possible with the real world conference it simulated.

- Nearly eliminated scheduling logistics.
- Stimulated more interactivity, communication, attention, and engagement than traditional approaches (webinars, web meetings, screen sharing, etc.).
- Comprehensive platform supplied everything needed to produce the virtual event, without requiring integration of third-party technology.
- Required just 12 weeks to spec, design, and deploy.
- 3-D collaborative meeting environment accurately replicated real-world facility.
- Novice users needed only minimal training to be productive.
- Scientists could access posters and documents, and collaborate more, after the event.
- Continues to deliver ROI after initial conference event has ended.



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Benefits

The company's IT team conducted a study to measure and compare the effectiveness of the virtual event to its real-world counterpart. The results are compelling.

- 83 percent said the virtual event in ProtoSphere was *the same or better* than meeting in the real world.
- 83 percent said access to the virtual posters' information in ProtoSphere was *the same or better* than seeing them in the real world.
- 88 percent said the time they spent at the virtual poster session in ProtoSphere was valuable.
- 94 percent said the information provided by presenters in ProtoSphere was valuable.
- 59 percent said the virtual symposium in ProtoSphere was *more valuable* than the in-person symposium.
- 100 percent said they would attend another virtual event in ProtoSphere.

Anecdotal evidence was collected in addition to precise metrics. Despite the fact the only 3-D realms participants ever saw were games, none characterized their ProtoSphere experience as a game.

Many reported they were *more comfortable* striking up conversations with senior scientists in ProtoSphere than they are in the real world. In fact, several reported they would *not* have engaged senior scientists with questions were the event held in the real world.

Most said the ProtoSphere environment kept them more engaged and attentive than a webinar or Web conference, thanks to its use of interactive avatars that provide context to communication with visual cues and gestures.

The company's IT team determined that a ProtoSphere environment could allow them to hold technology symposiums more frequently and for less cost. The ProtoSphere world was shown to be as effective as the real-world event in its fundamental purpose: accelerating knowledge transfer.

The potential to eliminate travel time and costs around the event was also proven, as was the platform's ability to reduce logistical requirements that typically vex meeting and event planners.

Lastly, the company's IT team found potential for ROI improvements over and above the real-world event. Scientists are still using the ProtoSphere environment months after the actual event, providing a "long tail" of information availability, knowledge transfer, and team collaboration that's simply not possible in a traditional three-day conference setting.

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