

Microsoft Industry Solution University



Figure 1 - The Microsoft Industry Solution University Virtual Event

Microsoft's Industry Solution University (ISU) is an annual series of conferences for Microsoft field sales staff focused on improving the sales of products and solutions to specific vertical industries. Each conference is held in a different geographic region and the speakers and content are tailored to the local audience. Each ISU audience is comprised of employees who are critically responsible for Microsoft's success within strategic verticals in that geographic region. Their effectiveness has a major impact on Microsoft's revenue and future opportunities.

For the 2009 series, Microsoft decided to invest in virtual event technology to achieve three key goals for two pilot regions:

1. Reduce attendee travel costs to achieve the highest possible return on investment.
2. Expand the reach of conference content to educate every potential attendee.
3. Improve the conference experience using Microsoft's latest technology.

"Out of the box, Boost Virtual Events offered everything we needed to reach our demanding attendees. When we had ideas for new features, the Boost team was able to customize the platform to meet our vision."

Zaakera Stratman, lead program manager for readiness events at Microsoft

Return on Investment

Traditionally, each regional conference was held in a major city within the host region and attendees would travel for the week to attend in person. Although costs would vary for this in-person attendance, consider the following conservative estimates:

- \$600 round-trip flight
- \$125 per night hotel
- \$75 per-diem

Using the estimates above, a 2-day conference with one extra day for travel would cost approximately \$1,200 per attendee. With 440 attendees, the cost for attendee travel & expenses can cost upwards of \$500,000 for this multi-day event, which doesn't account for the costs for the venue, equipment, or content, but can account for a significant portion of the event budget. With a virtual event, the travel costs are removed, resulting in an immediate and drastic increase in the return on investment.

Boost Virtual Events also provides support for virtual booths and attendee networks. Virtual booths enable sponsors and internal teams to promote their offerings to attendees using a variety of collaborative features, including live 1:1 chats with representatives, video broadcasts, and a full array of social networking features. For future events, ISU has the option to offer paid sponsorships to regional and global partners, creating a new revenue stream that also benefits attendees. Sponsors could even elect to sponsor sessions and attendee networks, enabling ISU to further reduce costs—or even potentially turn a profit!—in future years.

Expanded Reach

One of the challenges with in-person events is that some people may not be able to attend due to schedule conflicts or budget constraints. In addition, there is considerable inconvenience to traveling to an in-person event that can discourage participation, such as urgent deadlines, personal commitments, and the unpredictable nature of business. Microsoft ISU attendees have customer-facing roles where those interactions are a priority, so traveling on the road for a conference can really take them out of the business.

440 employees attended the two regional events held virtually in 2009. Of the 93 sessions made available to attendees, 42 were broadcast live. In most cases, multiple live broadcasts were held simultaneously, which is often a challenge for in-person attendees as they can only physically attend one session at a time. Fortunately, all of the live sessions were made available on-demand within 24 hours, enabling attendees to quickly and conveniently catch up on sessions they were unable to attend live.

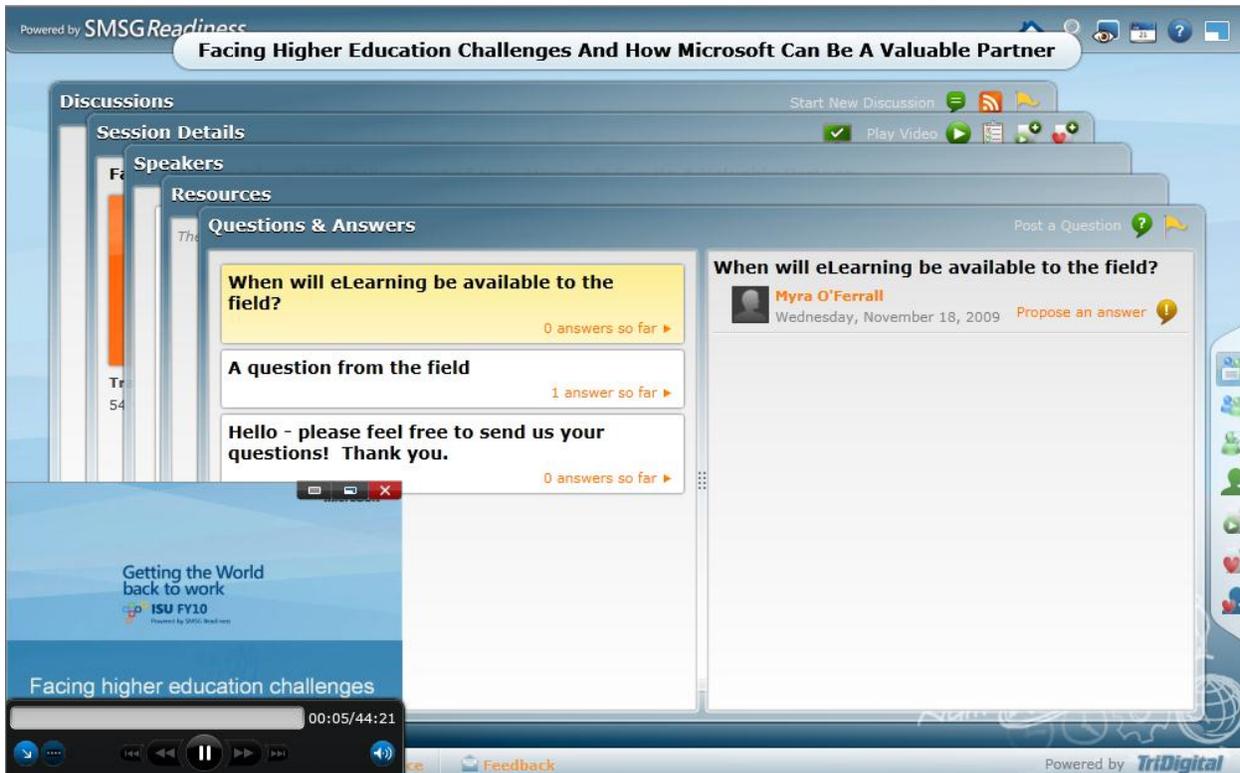


Figure 2 - Whether watching live or on-demand, attendees can conveniently access high-quality video and the latest community content

Another interesting fact was that nearly one third of the attendees were unavailable to watch any of the live broadcasts due to competing commitments. However, 55% of these attendees returned to watch the live sessions they missed on-demand within 24 hours of becoming available. Without the on-demand access, this significant portion of the audience would be unable to receive this important training.

“The statistics and reports provided by Boost Virtual Events really helped us understand how attendees were attending and receiving our training,” said Eileen Duffy, program manager for alliance business planning at Microsoft. “Thanks to this information, our events are going to be 10x better next year.”

In all, there were over 3,500 session views during the two weeks the event was running with 56% of them being watched as live broadcasts. A key factor to note is that many of the regional offices watched sessions as a group in conference rooms using a single account, so the percentage of total employees reached is actually higher than recorded.

Improved Experience

Experienced conference attendees expect a high level of value from investing their time in training events. In-person attendance often comes at a high cost since it requires them to virtually disengage from their daily routine for days at a time. While the allure of virtual events can be a promising

alternative to this problem, there are unique challenges to delivering a virtual experience that meets—and hopefully exceeds—expectations.

In 2009, ISU attendees were offered a virtual event that promised to make their time investment as efficient as possible. Rather than having to dedicate a full week to an event where they usually only need to attend 4-8 sessions, they were free to set their own schedule for attendance and build the session plan that best suited them. The results were amazing. The typical attendee visited the virtual event 5 times and averaged 89 minutes per visit. They also watched 8 sessions on average, meaning that many attendees found value in watching sessions that weren't necessarily targeted for them originally.

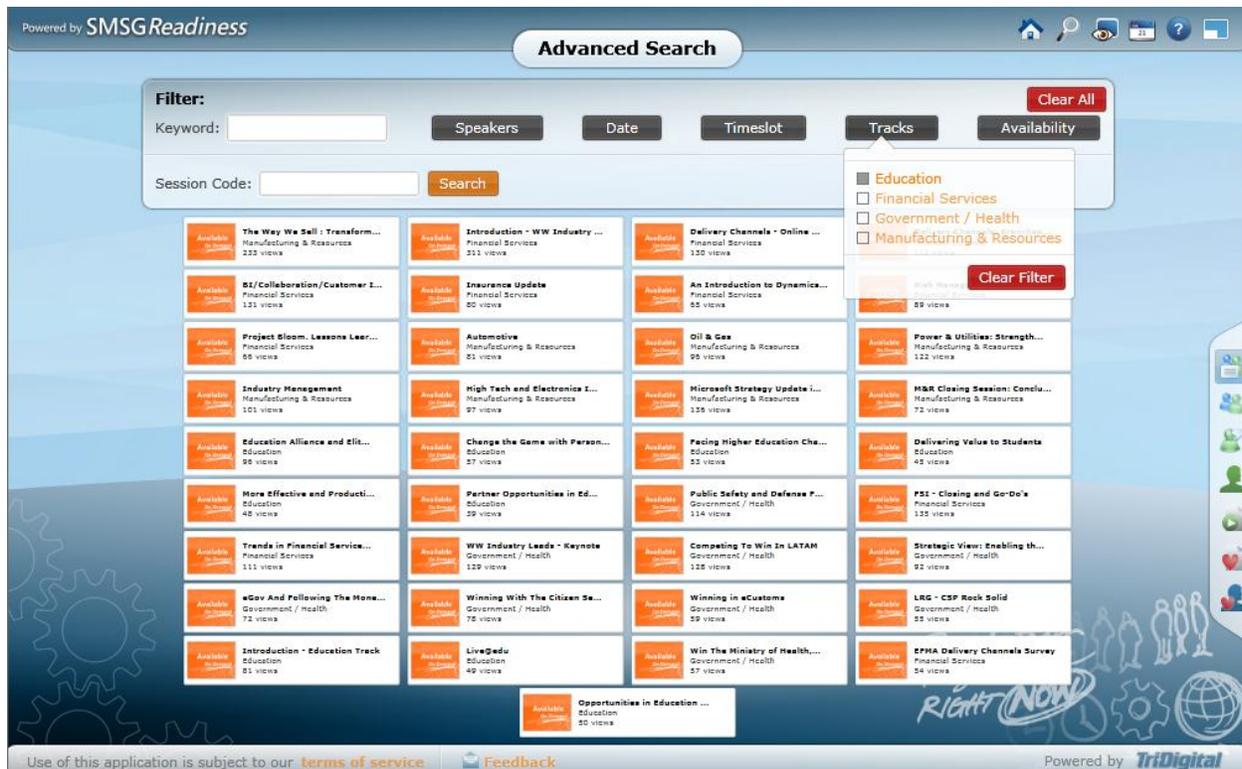


Figure 3 - Advanced search makes it easy for all attendees to find the content they needed

Having the ability to easily search & filter all sessions, add live broadcasts to their calendar of choice, and add on-demand sessions to their playlists greatly enhanced their ability to find the content they needed and consume it on their terms. Over 27% of users added at least one live session to their calendar of choice (Outlook, etc) so that they would be sure not to miss it. Fortunately, even if they missed the live broadcast they could simply return within 24 hours to watch it on-demand.

“While reducing costs was important, we knew we still had an obligation to attendees to deliver a great experience,” said Zaakera Stratman, lead program manager for readiness events at Microsoft. “We evaluated a few virtual event platforms, but the Boost Virtual Events Silverlight user experience really *wowed* everyone, so it was an obvious choice.”

Perhaps the hardest aspect of an event to replicate in a virtual environment is the collaborative nature of in-person meetings. Being able to raise your hand to ask a question during a session, or even privately discuss topics with fellow attendees, is a key factor in any effective training experience. Fortunately, the Boost Virtual Events user experience enables users to post questions during a session that be addressed by the presenter, as well as participate in threaded discussions that live on as the session passes from live to on-demand viewing. Over the course of the event, 10% of attendees posted at least one question before, during, or after a session for a total of 105 unique questions. Many of these questions were answered directly by the session's presenter, effectively delivering the authoritative response required. In addition, attendees have the option to connect with each other and speakers via Live Messenger, email, blogs, twitter, and other major interfaces, which required the consent of each party. Over 14% of attendees logged into Live Messenger during the course of the event, which enabled them to stay connected with the outside world and each other while attending sessions and browsing content.

Summary

In 2009, Microsoft took a risk in taking Industry Solution University online with Boost Virtual Events. Over the course of two regional conferences, this risk delivered amazing results by reducing costs, expanding reach, and providing a compelling attendee experience.

About Microsoft

Founded in 1975, Microsoft (Nasdaq "MSFT") is the worldwide leader in software, services and solutions that help people and businesses realize their full potential.

About Boost Virtual Events

Boost Virtual Events provides an end-to-end platform for delivering virtual events online. In addition to offering a compelling attendee experience that includes robust Web 2.0 integration, Boost Virtual Events also employs feature-rich tools that simplify the process of managing even the most demanding events. Boost Virtual Events is a venture of SharpLogic, a Microsoft Gold Certified partner. For more information on Boost Virtual Events, please contact:

Lan Kaim

Vice President, Business Development

Lan.Kaim@BoostVirtualEvents.com

(425)-830-5412