

Meeting Professionals International Simplifies User Experience

“a2z’s technical team that works on-site brings a project manager and software to the table, but they also bring incredible knowledge of the industry and business. It’s not about doing it the a2z way, but working to incorporate industry best practices. We learned a lot about how to do trade shows better.”

— Rick Fahnestock, Director of Technology, Meeting Professionals International (MPI)

CHALLENGE:

The MPI World Education Congress (WEC) brings together more than 4,000 meeting industry professionals to enhance their skills as leaders and strategic assets in their organizations. As the industry’s premier trade show, the WEC MeetingPlace features more than 600 exhibits and up to 1,000 exhibiting companies. In the past, exhibit space assignment was managed offline. Companies sent in space applications, and MPI prioritized requests by application date and spending history. It often took more than a month to assign space and confirm a single reservation. MPI needed an online system that would integrate with its existing proprietary Association Management Software (AMS) using web services, so all transactions with the association’s 22,000 members would be recorded in one place.

SOLUTION:

MPI selected a2z, Inc. in December 2006 to develop a scalable solution that could deliver real-time floor plan management, as well as web-based matchmaking and appointment-setting capabilities. Within 30 days of signing the contract, a2z developed an interface between a2zShow and MPI’s AMS system to create a seamless user experience. The online event management system went live on March 19, 2007, in time for 2007 WEC, July 28–31 in Montreal.

RESULTS:

The space reservation process that had taken two to three people up to four months now happens online in real time with almost no staff interaction. MPI members who conduct online transactions with the association experience the same look and feel, whether they are applying for booth space, registering for an event, or scheduling an appointment with a vendor. The simplified user experience enables members to access and update their own information and reinforces the value of membership by providing a detailed transaction history. Moreover, all member data resides on the MPI server, where it is automatically updated with each transaction. The benefits realized by MPI include:

- **Seamless user experience** — Transparent integration allows member services, exhibit management and registration software to communicate behind the scenes.
- **Efficient space reservation** — Exhibitors see space available in real time and reserve booths on a first-come, first-served basis. (Priority points will be honored at WEC 2008.)
- **Up-to-date profiles** — Members can view online profiles to maintain personal information and reconcile financial accounts.
- **Reduced IT time commitment** — Once the front-end development is done, IT services are no longer needed for event management — a time savings of up to 70 percent.
- **Reusable code** — The web services code can be reused with other vendors to create the same seamless integration with the member service system.
- **No extra staffing** — Automated space assignment eliminates the need to hire more event management staff.

“We store every transaction with the association—any purchase or registration—in the member profile, so members see their entire history and the value of membership. With the a2z integration, members don’t have to log into different accounts to get that information. Everything is in their member profile.”

— Rick Fahnestock, Director of Technology, Meeting Professionals International (MPI)