

# Case study 20 - virtual trade shows

## Using: 6Connex

### VisitBritain

Destination Britain North America (DBNA) has always been a live in-person event VisitBritain (VB) hosts each year in the US inviting British suppliers to showcase to American buyers. In 2019, DBNA decided to go virtually online, with the idea of reaching Travel Agents (TAs) rather than the Tour Operators (TOs). It was decided that there would be 3 virtual events over a 6-9-month period, but due to unforeseen circumstances, it became 3 over 3 months occurring at the beginning of 2020.

The virtual event was chosen in order to reach TAs (TOs were invited also) as Visit Britain do very little in reaching this market due to the difficulty being so large and budget. In recent (2019) research, more persons in the US were looking to TA's for travel and holidaying.

The company chosen to host our virtual event was travAlliance (who are part of Northstar Travel Group) using the platform provided by **6Connex**. The event would allow up to 30 British suppliers and unlimited buyers from North America (USA and Canada).

Suppliers would have their own personal booth and could upload up to 3 videos and 10 downloadable PDF files. Suppliers were allowed up to 6 representatives present to interact with buyers through either a public chat or by a private chat. Along with the supplier booths there was a networking lounge and a live 30-minute informative webinar on GB.

Setting aside the government side of things and struggling to get things to align, the first approach from supplier to live event took around 2 and a half months. Between the US and London, we managed to attract suppliers for all 3 events and through our contacts and primarily Northstar Travel Group, whose newsletter containing the invite for the events would reach around 100,000 people. In total, we received approximately 2,300 buyers and a total of 76 suppliers from all 3 events (some buyers and suppliers were repeats).

Cost per event (for all 30 booths) was \$30,000 and we offered a booth for a discounted rate of \$600. We were looking to try and cover 50% of costs but due to event 1 and 2 not being at full capacity along with complimentary booths to VB and companies contributing towards the grand prize, we didn't achieve this.

During and after the events we had received great feedback from both buyers and suppliers but with the unfortunate global pandemic, we have not seen much of the results as we would have liked. On the plus side, Great Britain and VB were one of the first big players to go into the virtual world before companies have been forced to in recent times.

It seems for the foreseeable future, most events will be online and we encourage companies to be part of that, but with everything, people will lose interest if results are not shown. Here at VisitBritain, we are already looking to go one step further in the virtual world, but once things get moving again, so will we.

*'The one piece of advice I'd give to any company looking to go virtually - you need to stand out, whether that's with a fun video or colourful brochures, you are fighting a very small space when it becomes virtually'.*

