![Adobe]

The next best experience to being there.

LavaCon Conference pioneers an immersive online track with Adobe Connect for 82% audience boost.

LavaCon

Established
2001
Employees: 6
Long Beach, California
www.lavacon.org

82%
Growth in overall attendance
since adding virtual option

Products:

Adobe Connect

🗒 Objectives

Scale LavaCon event with an online option to reach more content professionals

Provide immersive virtual event experience that offers valuable learning and networking benefits

Drive business growth by converting satisfied remote participants to in-person attendees

📊 Results

Delivered **engaging virtual conference experiences** that replicate in-person attendance

Saw near 100% rebound for in-person attendance and 2x virtual growth since 2022

Increased overall conference attendance by 82% since adding virtual track

Jack Molisani knew he was on to something big more than 20 years ago when he hosted what was expected to be a one-off technical writers' conference in Honolulu. Having set a breakeven goal of 140 attendees, the event exceeded all expectations when 560 people showed up. At the end of the conference, everyone was asking when the next one would take place.

Seizing on the business opportunity, Molisani launched The LavaCon Conference, an annual event fusing unmatched education and networking opportunities with a destination experience featuring the best of Hawaiian island culture, entertainment, and cuisine.
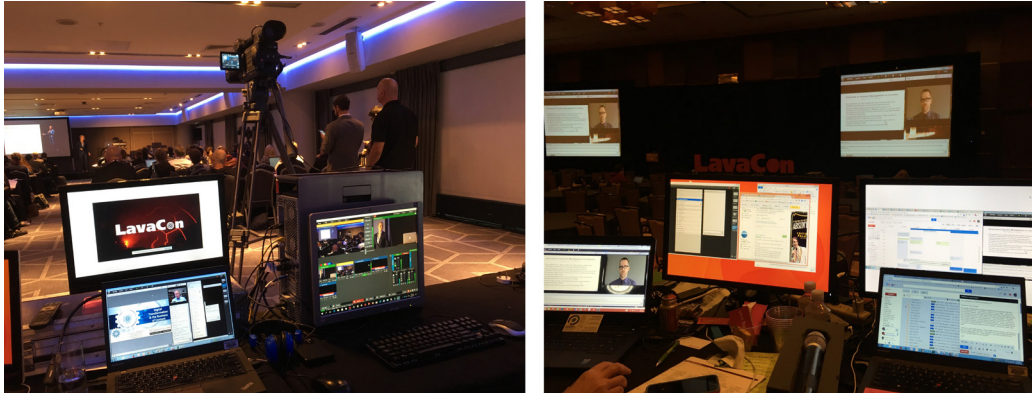
The LavaCon formula of bringing together content strategy and technical communication professionals thrived until the 2008 economic downturn. With businesses slashing budgets for travel to distant locales like Hawaii, attendance dropped.

In response, Molisani moved the conference to interesting cities in the mainland U.S. each year. By then the event was known for its "aloha spirit," and Molisani wanted to extend that to the mainland. He brought in Phylise Banner, one of the country's leading virtual experience designers, to create a virtual attendance option, offering an experience comparable to being there in person.

"Adobe Connect gives us the tools we need to create a fresh, dynamic virtual attendee experience. I wouldn't trade it for any other platform on the market!"

Jack Molisani
Executive Director, The LavaCon Conference

Bringing sizzle to the virtual conference experience

An early expert in creating dynamic online learning environments, Banner used her experience with Adobe Connect to originate LavaCon's inaugural online attendee track in 2014. "I knew that I could easily make this happen with Adobe Connect. There weren't other tools that were as fluid or customizable, and that easily enabled interaction. It was a natural choice," says Banner. From the outset, she harnessed the full potential of the platform's capabilities to bring an ahead-of-its-time, immersive conference experience to LavaCon's remote participants.

A decade later, Banner continues as LavaCon's innovative Virtual Experience Producer. The online track conveniently enables virtual attendees to get up to speed on the industry's hottest topics, such as the impact of AI on content development, presented by leading industry experts.

When participants join virtually, Banner welcomes them to a lively chat space where they can back-channel questions and share perspectives with over 200 virtual attendees. Banner takes pride in helping participants connect with each other, encouraging them to meet in breakout rooms to continue conversations about the latest industry research, career opportunities, and other common interests.

Each year, Banner enhances the layout of the attendee interface with local-style imagery like sun-soaked palm trees or vibrant cityscapes to bring online participants closer to the event location. The layout frames LavaCon's logo at the top of the screen for a consistent, branded attendee experience.

Recognizing that virtual attendees might become bored staring at a static event screen layout for the three days of the conference, Banner customizes the layout by moving around the various Adobe Connect room element pods to give each session a distinct look. Typically, one pod features the session speaker while another shows the slides.

Additional pods can include videos, quizzes, polls, or other resources with locally inspired, thematic background music. "No other online platform we evaluated over the years has that flexibility," says Molisani.

"We know we're doing a good job engaging virtual attendees when over 200 people register, they all show up in the morning, and most are still online with us at the end of the day," Banner says.

Molisani agrees. "We offered a virtual option long before groups were forced online during Covid. You could see attendees at other conferences losing interest and dropping off after a mere 20 minutes. By leveraging Phylise Banner's expertise and the flexibility of Adobe Connect, we keep our virtual attendees enthusiastically engaged all day!"

"A lot of people who first attend virtually see how amazing our event is and decide to come in person next time. It's a significant conversion metric that's contributed to our business growth."

Phylise Banner
Virtual Experience Producer, The LavaCon Conference

Converting online participants to in-person attendees

The LavaCon team uses multiple video feeds, including a roving videographer, to convey the feeling and fun of attending in person. Virtual attendees get a live, guided tour of the expo hall with opportunities to interact in real-time with exhibitors and vendors. They enjoy close-ups of the delicious lunches served at the conference. If the camera fogs up a bit from the steam of a hot dish, all the better for a rich, sensory experience.

"A lot of people who first attend virtually see how amazing our event is and decide to come in person next time," says Banner. "It's a significant conversion metric that's contributed to our business growth."
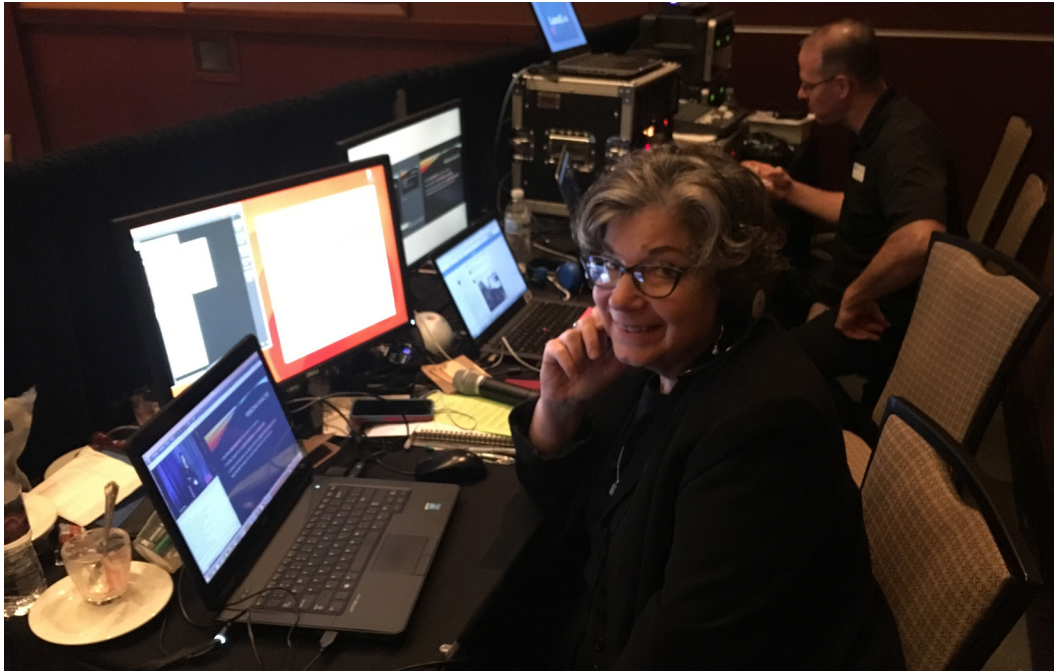
Since adding a virtual track, LavaCon's overall attendance has grown by 82%, not counting the Covid-19 pandemic years of 2021 and 2022, when the event was only offered online. Post-pandemic, LavaCon's in-person attendance has achieved a nearly 100% rebound, even as in-person events hosted by other organizations have continued to suffer. For LavaCon, virtual track participation has doubled since 2022, as compared to pre-pandemic. In 2023, LavaCon achieved its highest-ever attendance for in-person and remote participants combined.

Scaling for growth with efficient production tools

Banner can't imagine managing LavaCon's online evolution without Adobe Connect. She's streamlined the yearly production process using the application's content repository and reusable templates, which she quickly updates with each year's thematic elements.

"Backstage controls in Adobe Connect take the administrative drudgery out of setting up each session. There's so much functionality at the producer's fingertips that's not available in other solutions," says Banner. "I'm twice as productive because I can stage everything in advance. It frees up my time during the event itself to focus on delivering amazing online experiences for our participants."

Molisani agrees, crediting the virtual platform as key to LavaCon's growth. "Although we reluctantly tried another option when we went 100% virtual during the Covid pandemic, it took far longer to produce a completely virtual event using that software than it does to create a hybrid event with our favorite Adobe software. Adobe Connect gives us the tools we need to create a fresh, dynamic virtual attendee experience," he says. "I wouldn't trade it for any other platform on the market!"

Looking ahead to LavaCon's 25th anniversary in 2027, Molisani and Banner are already planning the event's triumphant return to Hawaii. "We are grateful for our long-standing partnership with Adobe, which has allowed us to enhance our event with a world-class virtual offering," says Molisani. "In a post-Covid era when many other event organizers have experienced attendance challenges, we have emerged stronger and better than ever."