

National Defense Industrial Association Integrates Exhibits, Association and Financial Management Systems

"Eighty-five percent of our revenue comes from meetings and tradeshow. It's crucial that we have e-commerce capabilities in place so we can handle our current business volume. Having a robust product like a2zShow fits right into our business model."

— Thomas Nordby, CAE, AVP of Business Operations
National Defense Industrial Association

CHALLENGE:

The National Defense Industrial Association (NDIA, www.ndia.org) is America's leading defense industry association promoting national security. NDIA provides its nearly 1,500 corporate and more than 55,000 individual members with outreach opportunities and sector coverage through local chapters, technical policy and war-fighting divisions, as well as the complimentary missions of four affiliate subsidiaries. The largest of these, the National Training and Simulation Association, produces the Interservice/Industry Training, Simulation and Education Conference (I/ITSEC), held annually in Orlando, Florida, with nearly 200,000 net square feet of exhibits and more than 16,500 registrants. In addition to I/ITSEC, NDIA and its affiliates organize about 80 other conferences and 20 tradeshow each year, generating 85 percent of the association's annual revenue.

Since 2006, NDIA has used Avectra's NetForum membership management software, a Web-based association management solution (AMS) built on the Microsoft .NET platform. The accounting department relies on Microsoft Dynamics (formerly Microsoft Great Plains), a financial management solution that also leverages .NET technologies to provide web services capabilities. Seamless integration of NetForum and Dynamics enables all business transactions to flow through the AMS and into the accounting system. NDIA needed a web-based exhibits management solution that could not only handle their high-volume and diverse trade show offerings efficiently, but could also integrate with both NetForum and Dynamics.

SOLUTION:

In order to handle the workload, NDIA chose to implement an automated trade show management solution that would enable a self-service model for exhibitors. The association began using a2zShow in early 2004 to manage about 20 shows a year, for the first time giving exhibitors online access to real-time floor plans, space selection and credit card payment. By early 2005, when the I/ITSEC tradeshow went online, NDIA was using a2zShow to manage shows ranging in size from 30 table top exhibits to 600 booths.

In early 2008, NDIA upgraded to a2zShow Version 7, built on the .NET platform to enable more seamless system integration. Transactions batched by type of payment are automatically uploaded from a2zShow to NetForum every 24 hours, keeping the two systems in synch. The accounting department reviews, closes and posts transactions in batches. Cross reference codes allow transactions to be tracked backwards or forwards through the system.

RESULTS:

The self-service business model automates the booth sales process, with credit card payments collected at the point of sale, putting money in the bank immediately. The automated process increases staff efficiency dramatically. Instead of processing exhibit sales transactions, the exhibits team can focus on selling sponsorships and other services. Human intervention is only required if, for example, an exhibitor must pay by check, or misses an early-bird deadline and requests a discount. Handled on a case-by-case basis, these transactions are now more manageable due to a2zShow's fully automated purchasing process.

The integration of web services on the .NET platform has enabled NDIA to make business decisions based on the most current financial data. The accounting department has access to up-to-date financials for more accurate reporting. With transaction data being traceable to its source, the system provides complete transparency. Powerful reporting features within a2zShow allow exhibit staff to quickly identify accounts with outstanding balances and email payment invoices.

After four full years of using a2zShow for exhibits management, NDIA has realized these tangible results:

- **Business process automation:** NDIA has developed business process scenarios to cover more than 90 percent of situations that arise during the online booth sales transaction.
- **Self-service environment:** Exhibitors manage their own accounts and can now make online payments on any balance due.
- **Sponsorship revenue increase:** The sponsorship program has grown since implementing a2zShow, because the management system frees the staff to focus on marketing the association's 20+ shows.
- **Additional contract business:** NDIA also organizes custom events for government clients. Having automated event management tools has made the association an attractive business partner.
- **Staffing efficiencies:** In seven years, NDIA's business volume has almost doubled, but staffing levels have stayed about the same.
- **Improved cash flow:** NDIA does the large majority of its business transactions through automated e-commerce based systems, putting cash in the bank 30-60 days earlier than a manual-based system.
- **Transparent audit trail:** Cross-reference codes enable transactions to be traced through a2zShow, NetForum, and to the credit card processing companies, so auditors can clearly see how revenues flow through the various systems.
- **Sophisticated financial reporting:** P&L statements and balance sheets more accurately reflect cash flow, with up-to-date data on revenue generated vs. collected.

"We make sure that our preferred way of doing business is viewed as the easiest way for our customers to interact with us. We are fully committed to e-commerce based operations. When a2zShow Version 7 came out, it wasn't a question of if we would upgrade, it was a question of when."

— Thomas Nordby, CAE, AVP of Business Operations
National Defense Industrial Association