# Digital Innovation: What will be our tools for the future?

## Introduction

We would like to enter the Gleanin Social Registration platform into the UFI Technology Award 2016. Gleanin build social tools solely for the Exhibition market.

The social web is changing the world, in culture, politics, relationships and more. Given that the business of exhibitions is based on connecting people and businesses, successful events of the future will be those that best leverage this change.

Our Social Registration platform complements the leading registration companies and enhances the registration experience for both registrants and exhibitors. It was extremely important for us to ensure we did not ignore the exhibitor brands personnel attending as they are the ones who typically hold all the relationships.

## What drove you to develop a new programme/tool?

We have been supplying a social media monitoring tool to the Exhibition industry since 2012. Our clients kept telling us their biggest problem was finding new audience for their exhibitions. They said this constant hunt for more registrations was getting more difficult especially as email was becoming less effective.

We went back to basics and looked at what registrants actually want. A 2013 study from the Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR) reveals what attendees want from trade shows. 69% say they attend to meet "shopping needs," including see new technology, talk to experts, discover and interact with new products, compare brands, and gather competitive intelligence. 66% of attendees attend to meet "learning needs," such as find out about industry trends, network with other professionals, improve job performance, and develop skills.

We believe the social web can help enhance many of those reasons for attending. We also believe that if you enhance the registrants experience they are more likely to spread the word about the event. In 2015 we launched our social registration platform to do just that.
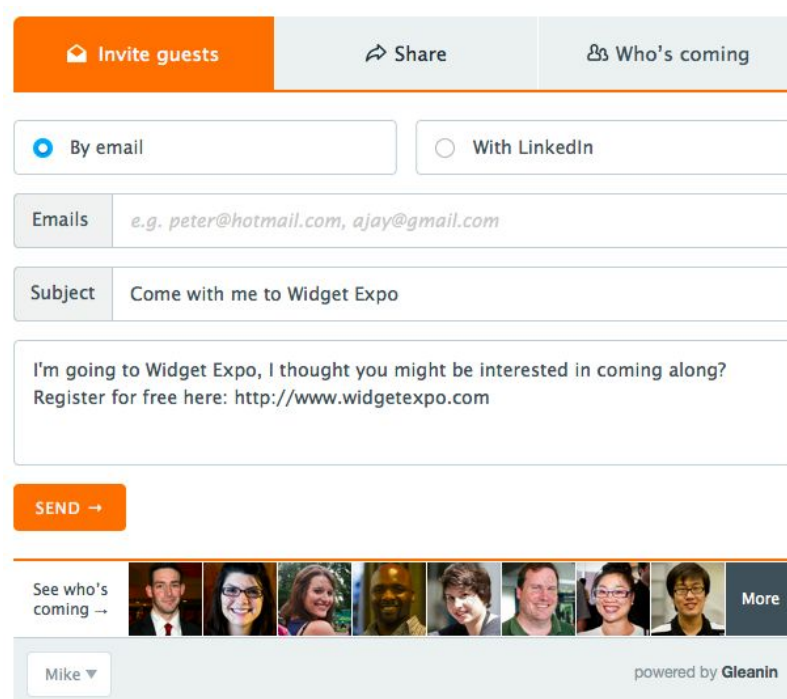
## What were the main objectives?

Our objectives were simple:

- Develop a platform that worked alongside, and not in competition with, the leading registration companies.
- Give registrants a better experience by enhancing the registration flow with social data relevant to them - who they know attending and exhibiting.
- Make it extremely easy for registrants to invite others, and broadcast their attendance,s to their social networks.
- Give exhibitors more value, and increases registrations by tapping into the social networks of the exhibiting brands AND their stand personnel.

## Which value added services did you seek to provide?

We add a social layer to the registration and exhibitor manual/badging process

- **Registrants** - Provide registrants with the opportunity to view others from within their social networks that are already registered.

- **Exhibitor brands & their personnel** - Provide exhibitor staff with the ability to log in to see who from their own networks or followers of the company are registered and give them the opportunity to invite their prospects to the event.

## What measures did you take to reach those objectives?

We…

- **Embarked on a 12 month development program:** We embarked on a software development program with the backing of our investors including the ex-CEO of UBM and institutional investors.

- **Established special access to LinkedIn's closed "connections" API program:** When it comes to establishing B2B relationships LinkedIn is the social network of choice. The problem for us was that LinkedIn had closed off access to their "connections" API and we need to apply for special access to. Thankfully we were successful in our application.

- **Integrated with existing registration companies:** We initially worked closely with 2 registration companies for our pilot - N200 and Show Data Systems - convincing them that we were not out to take their business away, but complement it. Having an honest and open relationship with them allowed us to demonstrate the value we could add and the direction we were going in.

- **Tested and iterated on pilot with clients:** As software developers the tendency is to lock yourself away in a room and build what you believe to be something amazing, often the market thinks otherwise. We were determined not to fall into this trap and worked closely with our pilot events at UBM and 2 other smaller organisers. We iterated and tested alongside the marketing teams.

## What were the specific challenges faced? How were these overcome?

- **Establishing registrants Trust** - With permission from registrants and other stakeholders to "see" into their social media networks, organisers gain insight into who the market influencers are, who they aren't reaching through traditional marketing channels, and hidden sources of revenue (on paid registrations).

  While the exchange of access to social networks in return for insight is presumed to be a good one for those (at least) who opt in, you have to approach it carefully. For example, the automatic status update (when the organiser posts a message like "Hey, I've just registered for the ABC event" on a customer's social media profile without the account holder's knowledge or

explicit permission) can be a double-edged sword.

Many registrants are wary about sharing their social details having been taken advantage of previously. It is our job as software developers to do the right thing and make it absolutely clear what we will and will not do when the registrants put their trust in us by sharing their details. We do this by always doing the expected thing, making benefits clear, making disclaimers clear, and providing multiple opportunities for a registrant to add their details when they feel comfortable and realise there is something in it for them.

- **Gaining the trust of incumbent registration providers** - Our social registration platform only works with the blessing of the registration companies as we need to plug into their registration flows. Not all registration companies were initially open to the idea as they saw us as a threat. But over time we have managed to convince most that we are complementary to their service, and saves them huge development cost and time to stay current.

- **Access to closed LinkedIn API** - our biggest unknown when we embarked on this project was if we would get access to the closed LinkedIn API. At the start of 2015 LinkedIn closed access to their "connections" API and only gave access to a handful of partners. Our initial application was rejected, so this project almost didn't get off the ground. However, after reaching out to them again, and sitting down with LinkedIn we demonstrated to them that we actually enhanced the value for LinkedIn users registering to attend a B2B event.

- **Proving social registration is a marketing channel** - Convincing exhibition marketeers that social registration is a true marketing channel initially was hard without hard numbers. The effectiveness of some channels is easier to measure than others. For example, it is easier to attribute an individual's attendance to the receipt of a pre-populated registration link via email than it is to a direct mail piece. As we went through our pilot phase and got more early adopters using our service we have been able to demonstrate the value.

Channels have to be constantly evaluated against the alternatives. Cost per acquisition or cost per attendee (CPA) is one metric marketers can use to compare social registration against their other channels in order to arrive at the optimum mix and budget allocation.

## Were your objectives reached?

**Objective 1 reached:** *Develop a platform that worked alongside, and not in competition with, the leading registration companies.*

Last month we had over 100,000 registrations go through our social registration platform in a single month. We had 28 Exhibitions with registration open live on our platform in January 2016. We work with the largest registration companies in Europe including: N200, cvent, Show Data, LiveBuzz, Circdata, EAS and Interchange.



**Objective 2 & 3 reached:** *Gives registrants a better experience by showing them who they know and make it extremely easy to invite others and broadcast attendance*

Our widget can be easily deployed in the registration flow, and the engagement we have got suggested it has been a success.

On average across our Exhibitions over 4% of all registrations can be confidently attributed to an invite sent via the Gleanin Social Registration platform. This number is higher when you take into account the less easy to measure impact of registrants broadcasting the attendance. 10% of all registrants are now either sending an invite or broadcasting their attendance.

**Objective 4 partially reached:** Give exhibitors more value, and increases registrations by tapping into the social networks of the exhibiting brands AND their stand personnel.

Getting exhibitors to engage has proved to be tricky. On our best Exhibition to date we have managed to get 30% of Exhibitors to engage and get value as seen by the number of stand staff they went on to invite to the tool. But we have a long way to go in driving engagement and conveying the value.

## What relevant results can you share?

Quantitative results -

- **More registrations** - We are seeing Cost Per Registrations (CPR) ranging from £5 ($7.50) to £15 ($22.50)

- **Better conversion** - Interestingly, pre-registrants who engaged with social registration converted to attendees at up to 15% better. This is particularly important in Europe where trade shows are typically free to attend and only 50% of registrants typically show up.

- **Invites sent & success** - On average 9% of all registrants are choosing to send invites. These invites are converting to registrants at an average of 30%.

- **Broadcasts sent** - Depending on the priority placed by the organiser in generating reach through registrants broadcasting their attendance, we have seen between 3% and 10% of all registrants broadcasting their attendance. The actual impact in terms of registrants is harder to measure.

Qualitative results -

- **Reg companies playing ball** - More registration companies are integrating with us now, suggesting the initial threat they perceived has started to wain.

- **No extra effort for marketeers** - Exhibition marketers now understand that are not going to be taking on more work, initially this was a worry.

- **Exhibitor value** - Some way to go, but huge potential - Exhibitor brands & their stand staff that have engaged have got tremendous value from seeing who they already know attending an Exhibition.

## Conclusion

We have only scratched the surface, we believe the social data points we are collecting will allow us to build the exhibition marketing tools of the future which enhance the experience for all.

But, we must remember to maintain the trust of our audience, and not do something just because we can.