



Working Smarter

By Christopher Durso

Take Away

Pages Without Pages

A new application successfully tested at two recent major medical shows is taking the e-reader from beach books to conference content

When Beth Croll, CMP, bought Barnes & Noble's Nook electronic-book reader, it was supposed to be a Christmas present for her husband — a “technical guy” who “subscribes to lots of different journals and books,” said Croll, senior manager of the Scientific Sessions program for the American Heart Association (AHA), “and every few years they publish a new edition.”

But then came Scientific Sessions 2009, held on Nov. 14–18 at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, during which the AHA piloted OASIS, a new application from Coe-Truman Technologies that made its 550-page final program, as well as its exhibitor guide, available as e-book downloads from the 21,000-attendee event's homepage. That meant that people with a Nook, an Amazon.com Kindle, a Sony Reader, an iPhone, or

2009, held on Oct. 17–21 at McCormick Place in Chicago. The company was responding to a variety of forces, Jenkins said, including greening, the desire to cut costs, and the need to move content more quickly and fluidly. “There's this intersect where content is evolving,” Jenkins said. “The challenge was, we would survey association staff, and they were telling us consistently that they personally don't use these devices. We were scratching our heads, because we see plenty of attendees who appear to use their phones and other mobile devices to see content.”

Coe-Truman's instincts turned out to be pretty good. Amazon hasn't released sales figures for the Kindle — the most popular e-reader on the market by far — but business analysts have estimated that the company sold three million last year alone. Barnes & Noble debuted the Nook last October —

“I love to read, but when I buy a paper book, I feel guilty now.”

most other portable wireless devices could eschew hard-copy versions of the program and exhibitor guide in favor of paper-free, easily navigable e-pubs. Or they could download e-reader software onto their laptops, and look at the pubs that way.

About 2,500 people visited the e-book section on the Scientific Sessions homepage, according to Jon Jenkins, product manager for OASIS, with 684 of them actually downloading the publications — “which reflects 27 percent of conversions to download, which is great.”

Behind the scenes, Croll herself was hooked. “Since [Scientific Sessions 2009], ... I love to read, but when I buy a paper book, I feel guilty now,” she said, laughing. “I feel like I've got to share it with multiple people or I've hurt a tree.”

Coe-Truman worked on OASIS for a few years before debuting it at both Scientific Sessions 2009 and the Society for Neuroscience's (SfN) Neuroscience

only to announce a month later that it was sold out for the holidays. Apple has sold more than 40 million iPhones worldwide since launching the device in 2007, and its iPad, announced in January, has generated a lot of buzz.

Eventually, Coe-Truman gathered enough data to approach some of its clients, including the AHA and SfN, about testing OASIS at their events. In addition to being more environmentally friendly than printed materials, e-book pubs offer a certain ease of use — including search and bookmarking capabilities. That's not an insignificant selling point when you're talking about a 550-page program, even on a small screen. “It was surprising to see the uptake of basic session content on devices like the iPhone,” Jenkins said. “What we've found is that if you're already carrying a device with you, it's a pretty natural derivative to check a calendar or program on that same device.” ■

Papered Over

The e-book option at the AHA's Scientific Sessions 2009 was as much about providing “one more electronic method” for attendees to access content as it was about saving the planet, according to Beth Croll, CMP.

Not that greening isn't a priority for the AHA. “We are absolutely trying to participate in the green initiative,” Croll said. “We've put together a plan of several things we've done and plan to do. [The e-book application] isn't something we thought of, but it absolutely fits into this.”

Is going completely paperless in the future for the AHA? “Yes,” Croll said. “But not quite yet. Definitely a long-term goal.”

► **Christopher Durso** is executive editor of *Convene*.

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