

CASE STUDY

Cvent and Penn State University:
Partnering to Expand
Educational Reach

cvent

Founded in 1855, Penn State is one of America's oldest public land-grant universities – and, with its consistent ranking among the top one percent of the world's universities, one of the best. As a land-grant institution, Penn State has a federally mandated requirement to extend its agricultural research and education to the citizens of the state. To fulfill this mission, the university offers extension programs across the entire state, allowing people to register for conferences, events, and non-credit programs from Scranton in the east to Shenango in the west.



Coordinating such a wide range of events across a large number of colleges and campuses is no easy feat, and much of the work falls to the Office of Conferences and Short Courses (OCSC), located within the College of Agricultural Sciences, which plays a key role in planning and managing the university's educational outreach programs. But as the new millennium brought new events and an increased demand for online programs, the OCSC realized that its old system of event and conference planning had become unsustainable.

Cumbersome Conference Planning



In 2006, Mary Seaton joined the College of Agricultural Sciences as Assistant Director of College Relations which also included management of the OCSC. Soon after, the college went through a business process review to identify an online registration tool that could help increase efficiency and professionalism in the delivery of all events. This process revealed that growth was being hindered by an enrollment process that was both laborious and time-consuming, relying on multiple databases, manual-registration processes, and a marketing program that did not extend beyond direct mailings. The outreach programs also lacked a standardized fee structure, consistent branding, and a defined set of services to be used in promoting programs and attracting consumers.

BEFORE

For the OCSC's annual Government and Industry Day event, for example – an on-campus luncheon with some 700 attendees, including high-profile guests such as the governor and other key speakers – planning would begin several months out. In addition to employing the resources of existing staff, three additional assistants were hired to handle manual processes such as compiling the invitation list, stuffing and mailing 4,000 letters, and, finally, capturing the responses that were sent back.

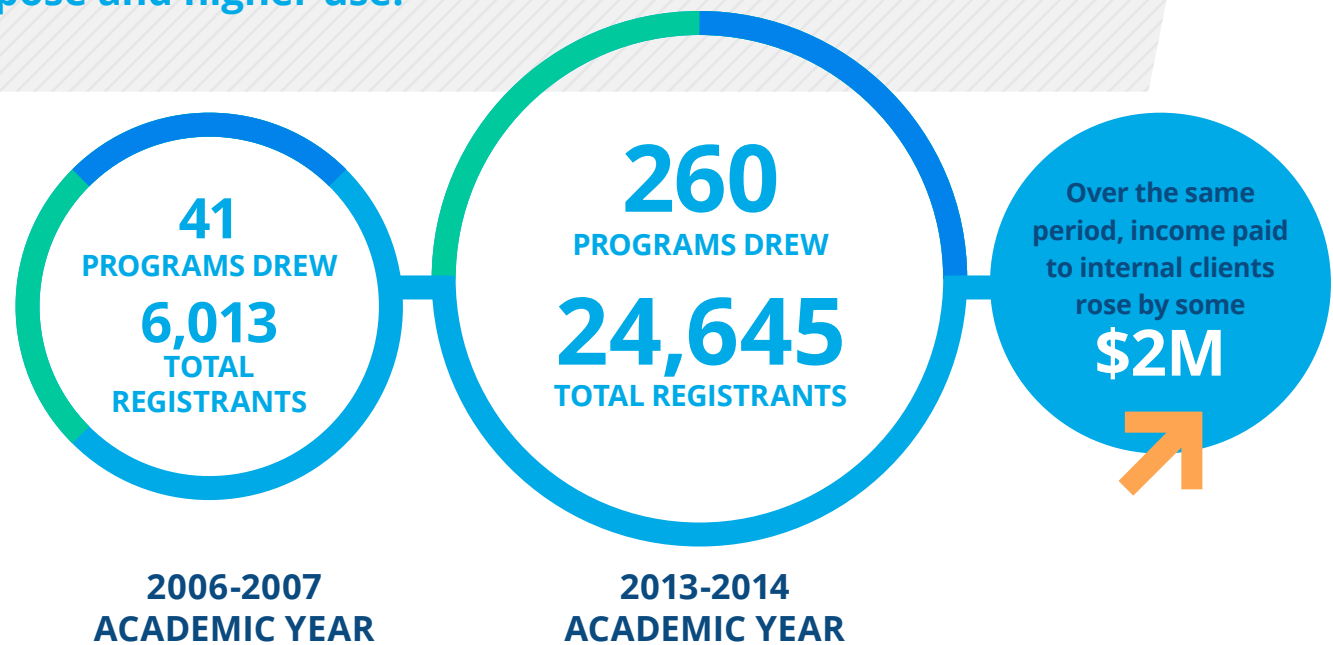
Seaton knew it was time for a drastic change – and she turned to Cvent for the solution.

An Explosion of Registration and Revenue

AFTER

Seaton's quest for change was realized almost immediately. In 2006, the first year of the Cvent partnership, 250 attendees registered online for Government and Industry Day within the first afternoon. By 2018, 90 percent of participants registered without anyone in the office having to play a direct role. "Our staff realized that Cvent was providing them with the ability to work more efficiently and effectively," says Seaton, "giving them the ability to work for a higher purpose and higher use."

Staff efficiency wasn't the only improvement, however. Thanks to its partnership with Cvent, the OCSC experienced astounding year-on-year growth across all programs in terms of number of registrants for events, total income, and income paid to internal clients (other Penn State departments and programs).



An Explosion of Registration and Revenue



Over time, the value of Cvent spread to other functional units across the university, leading to 10 distinct accounts by 2018. As illustrated in the table below, the Extension Program, in particular, has seen tremendous growth since starting with Cvent in 2011.

CVENT REGISTRATION GROWTH ACROSS PENN STATE

	2006	2011	Today
College of Agriculture Sciences	6,000		25,000
Extension		5,000	40,000
Additional Units Across the University			35,000
TOTAL ANNUAL REGISTRATIONS			100,000

After seeing tremendous growth year over year, OCSC leveled off at 25,000 to ensure that they are able to deliver the same quality of services with existing resources.

Extension continues to grow and the college has invested more resources to support the demand.

In addition to OCSC and Extension, eight other functional units across the university now leverage Cvent for an additional combined 35,000 registrations, meaning that today, Cvent supports more than 100,000 registrations per year for events and programs offered across the university. What was once a labor-intensive, manual process has been transformed, thanks to Cvent, into a streamlined system that empowered staff, expanded the number of programs by a factor of six, and increased income tenfold.

The Power of Data

Efficiency, revenue, and program expansion were not the only benefits of the partnership.

“Cvent also brings the value of data,” explains Seaton. “Data insights provide another way for us to show a success story and help stakeholders understand what’s happening with their program and registrations.”



The switch from a system based on manual inputs to one fueled by data has allowed the OCSC to bring the power of science and statistics to bear in improving the efficiency of its outreach and engagement programs.

“If you don’t have data, and you’ve never had it, it’s hard to see what you can really learn and understand about your programs and audience, says Seaton. “But once stakeholders gained visibility into year-on-year data, they started to become data-centric and wanted more and more. It’s a huge value-add.”

Marketing – From Manual to Digital

Streamlining their enrollment process also meant evolving their marketing efforts from manual to digital, using a hybrid strategy that combined an electronic marketing campaign with targeted mailings driving to online or phone. This shift to targeted outreach and online tracking introduced the ability to measure impact, reach, and ROI. After this switch, OCSC saw an increase in registrations and enrollments, year-on-year, while reducing marketing costs. Suddenly, they were able to do more with less:



REDUCED COSTS

Marketing and direct mail costs were drastically reduced by targeting specific audiences through digital marketing that leveraged the contact list developed by Cvent.

MORE INFORMED PROGRAM STRATEGY

Cvent's implementation of survey questions (including registration, regret, and post-event questions) allowed OCSC to better understand participants' experiences and needs, helping the college improve their offerings.

BROADER REACH

Promoting programs digitally allowed OCSC to reach new audiences, allowing viewers to search and register for the educational offering of their choice – all online.

INCREASED ENGAGEMENT AND REGISTRATION

OCSC experienced an average 50 percent increase in registrations and enrollments, year-on-year, from 2007 – 2011.

Expanding Services – and Success



OCSC's success story began generating interest in other areas of the university and, in 2010, Seaton and the College of Agricultural Sciences decided to make the Cvent service offering available to other colleges and departments. Today, the office provides four levels of event-planning services and fees, 60 percent of its clients come from departments outside of the College of Agricultural Sciences, and it continues to grow, with an average of two to three new program requests per week. Cvent has helped every step of the way, allowing OCSC to expand its offerings across a number of areas, including student development, professional conferences and programs, youth programs, and enrichment programs offered through the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI).

“Everyone who has used Cvent at this university, regardless of their implementation plans, has seen success,” says Seaton. “Our plan is to build on that success and improve access to the platform, while still maintaining standards and meeting university policy requirements.”

Longer-term, Penn State is looking to expand Cvent access to the entire university community – regardless of whether they have their own account – offering options for either self-service or a more streamlined way to formally request OCSC's more complex services. In this way, OCSC's expansion serves as a catalyst for more innovation to better serve the growing base of university users. With the increase in revenue, registrants, and participants, even more people will benefit from Penn State's conference, events, and non-credit programs, not only helping the university more effectively fulfill its land-grant mission, but also expanding educational opportunities to more Pennsylvania citizens – a win for all concerned.



Cvent has been helping institutions reach and engage more people since 1999.

To find out more about how Cvent can increase efficiency and engagement at your institution, providing data-driven insights and increased ROI, please contact us [here](#).