

# How an In-person Conference Added a Virtual Component by Leveraging Bizzabo



## About the Event

Main Point of Contact  
Sheryl McFadden, Event  
Coordinator

Company  
Southern Baptists of Texas  
Convention

Industry  
Nonprofit

Favorite Features  
Registration Management,  
Dynamic Agenda Builder, Bizzabo  
Native App, Speaker & Sponsor  
Management

## Overview

Learn how a large nonprofit organization turned its in-person convention into a hybrid event and gained valuable data insights by offering a virtual attendee experience.

## Background

The [Southern Baptists of Texas Convention](#) (SBTC) aims to impact the lives of local communities and the world. In February 2021, the SBTC hosted one of the very first genuinely hybrid events – Empower 21 – at a large convention center in Texas with a virtual audience from around the world.



## The Challenge

### Extending a Convention's Reach by Going Hybrid

The Empower Conference was designed to be an entirely in-person event. As the event date drew closer, it became clear to Event Coordinator Sheryl McFadden and her team that there was still a considerable need for a digital experience. Some attendees expressed that they were not ready to attend an onsite event and others wanted to join from other regions or time zones.

McFadden needed to find a platform to support both an onsite and virtual event and seamlessly integrate the two to create one experience. The SBTC team happened to be renewing its license with Cvent when Empower 2021 shifted from in-person to hybrid.

When looking at different solutions, Bizzabo stood out because it was an “easier platform for the team to set up, manage the registration flow, and design,” according to McFadden. The team found Bizzabo to be a logical and intuitive flow that made it easy to build and manage an event from start to finish.

“We were previously with Cvent and coming up to renewal; we researched different platforms and really liked Bizzabo. So when it came to renew our virtual and in-person software, the functionality and ease of use set Bizzabo apart.”

**Sheryl McFadden**  
Event Coordinator

# The Solution

## An Intuitive, Fully Loaded Hybrid-ready Platform

One of the trickier aspects of planning a hybrid event is how to set up tickets and registration. McFadden and her team were among the first to test the waters of hybrid, and they wanted to create a seamless attendee journey without sacrificing any registration data.

McFadden strategically set up two ticket types: one for virtual and one for in-person attendees. SBTC generated revenue from the in-person tickets by charging according to meals.

“Our in-person tickets were paid and that was based on the meals they were staying for,” she said. “So we built out ticket types to reflect that, and I then made those tickets conditional, so it tells the registration, ‘If they register for this, then show these tickets as available.’”

“With Bizzabo, we had the ability to register the virtual attendees along with the in-person attendees and collect the data of who was watching live versus in-person..”

**Sheryl McFadden**  
Event Coordinator

McFadden also used the Bizzabo mobile app to further enhance the experience for the in-person attendees. The native app integrates directly with the event website and can be easily customized to fit the needs of each event. The team encouraged all of the in-person Empower 21 attendees to use the floor locator so they could easily navigate the large conference hall and find their sessions.

“I used the floor locator, which connected with the map inside the app, and I added a venue map because we had four floor levels,” she said.

McFadden used QR codes on branded signage throughout the venue to guide attendees safely through the space and create a personalized, effortless onsite experience. Using posters, stickers, and swag was also a great way for the Empower team to add branding elements to the onsite design.

“We had branded floor stickers and posters reminding people to stay 6 feet apart, and we offered branded masks and swag for everyone, and they were all individually wrapped,” she said.

One of the other benefits of the native app is that it eliminates the need for print collateral. McFadden was passionate about promoting sustainability

in her events and saw the Bizzabo app as a great way to do so. The app also helped make Empower a contactless onsite experience, creating even more ways to make their in-person attendees feel safe and comfortable.

The venue portion also featured sponsoring exhibitors. While virtual attendees could connect with those brands online, in-person attendees could visit the booths, which SBTC strategically placed to ensure everyone was safe and comfortable.

“We had exhibitors onsite, and we set up a space for them and made sure they were 10 feet apart from the next booth,” she said.

McFadden doubled down on the technical production of Empower 21 to ensure that the virtual audience had the best experience possible and felt as included and present as the venue audience. In each of the main session rooms, the Empower 21 team had three cameras and an onsite production team that called the camera angles. They streamed those sessions directly to a live feed for the virtual attendees and made the recordings available on-demand after the conference.

“It’s really cool how Bizzabo works. With the logic built into the platform, we could hide the breakouts that weren’t available to the virtual user, helping us make the platform work for both our onsite and virtual attendees.”

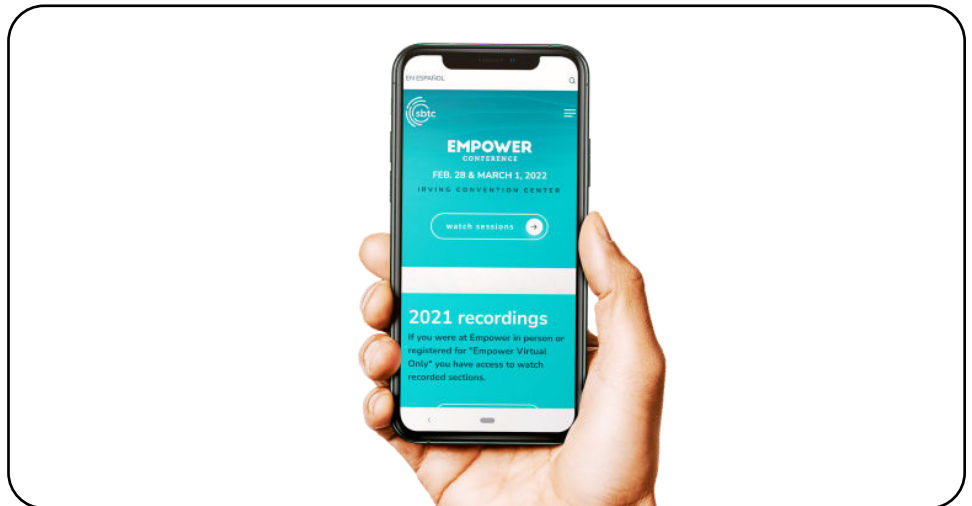
**Sheryl McFadden**  
Event Coordinator

The team also offered on-demand access for both audiences so people who attended live could get a virtual ticket to watch sessions they missed or rewatch content they found valuable.

“With so many sessions – and concurrent sessions – even our in-person attendees could benefit from accessing on-demand content, which Bizzabo’s magic link makes so easy,” McFadden said. “We didn’t charge for the virtual ticket, so we thought, ‘Well, what would make someone want to also access the virtual ticket, what’s the added benefit?’”

McFadden was equally focused on delivering content in a way that would effectively reach all of her attendees, as this was a massive conference with more than 50 sessions. She made it simple for attendees to filter through sessions by using tags on the agenda page.

“I used multiple tags for the agenda. Topic tags, session tags for breakout session 1, 2, etc, and then I also tagged it by day, making it easy for attendees to narrow down their choices quickly,” she said.



## The Results

### A Successful, Data-rich Event Experience

Empower 21 was attended by 1,366 people (1,069 onsite, 297 virtual) and featured 37 speakers and 16 sponsors. After deciding to pivot to hybrid, McFadden successfully created a truly integrated experience that made onsite attendees feel safe and virtual attendees feel included.

By setting up unique ticket types, McFadden could guide all of her attendees through their personalized event journey – in-person or virtual. She also gathered valuable insights from data collected through the registration workflow and elsewhere to understand precisely which speakers, sessions, and content the attendees engaged with the most.

“We were able to see how long each virtual attendee stayed interested in a session,” she said. “We had three speakers in each main session so we could gauge their interest based on when they logged back in and what they looked at to determine which speakers they liked most.”