LET'S TALK TECH

Game-changing technology companies with local roots are making a global impact.

BY BOBBY HART

VoiceHive makes audience interaction fun and simple.

AN IRISHMAN WALKS INTO A BAR ... an Irish pub, no less, and discovers an opportunity to use technology as a way to engage his audience. Not funny? That's because it's not a joke, though the man referenced, John Cosgrove, is in fact a professional comedic emcee from Northern Ireland. He's also the founder of VoiceHive, a web-based presentation platform for events that Cosgrove conjured up while hosting trivia events at Kieran's Irish Pub in Minneapolis. His idea was to transform trivia from a messy pen-and-paper-based activity to a simple, interactive application that would change the energy in the room. "I saw firsthand how technology could bring people together," he says. "In my work as an emcee, I had a front row seat to numerous conferences and events, and I believed there was a way to improve the user experience."

Cosgrove partnered with web developer and co-founder Andy Grant in 2012 to transform his idea into reality. "The best analogy to describe [Andy's] contribution is that he took my go-cart with a lawn mower engine and built a Tesla," Cosgrove says.

That Tesla now provides audience interac-

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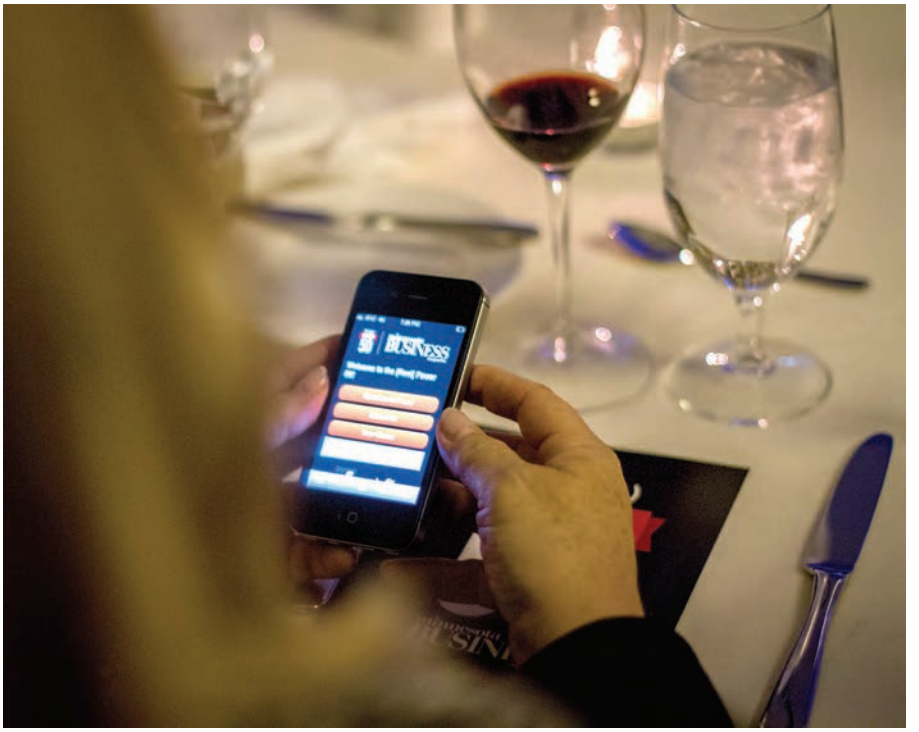

tive web applications for events of all sizes.

VoiceHive has evolved over the years from initially just offering live Q&A and polling during events, to further interacting with audience through improving registration sites and putting agendas and bios at the fingertips of attendees, who now can participate in and view word clouds. New tools Cosgrove is hoping to implement in the future include language accommodation, additional live display options, support for attendee payments during registration and more gamification options to promote networking.

"We make interaction fun and we make it easy," Cosgrove says. "We are always dreaming up better ways to improve the audience experience through technology. We listen to what planners and audiences want and we make it happen. Our attitude is 'Yes is the answer. Now, what is the question?'"

Cosgrove says his biggest challenge is explaining to people that VoiceHive shouldn't get caught in the traditional app stigma that suffers from bandwidth, downloading and password problems and certain device restrictions.

"We are a web-based platform that is easy to access from any device, requires no downloading or remembering of passwords," he says. "There is no app-store drama, there is no bandwidth or memory space issues with our technology. Changes are always made in real time. VoiceHive simply puts your content when and where you want it."

VoiceHive's applications are custom tailored to fit event themes and messages, measuring responses in real time and collecting important event data. Some common tools include: registration forms, polling, surveys and live Q&A. "In simplest terms, we look like a website," Cosgrove explains, "but it's the power of our technology and applications that engage and entertain audiences."

Cosgrove works with many local independent planners who provide services to large companies and organizations across the globe. One such planner, Julie Ann Schmidt, CMM, CMP, managing partner at Lithium Logistics Group, appreciates introducing her clients to a custom cloud-based product without the expensive price associated with many custom apps. "They are a solution partner, not a vendor—they look for ways to improve the program and ways the app could make the client's life easier," Schmidt says of VoiceHive. "The fact that you can decide to add something on-

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Mark Fields, CEO of Ford, used Lumi's Meetoo app at the Detroit North American International Auto Show during live sessions.

site, they can add it in minutes and it is live for me is a big deal."

VoiceHive relies heavily on word-of-mouth referrals from attendees, event planners and marketing companies that have successfully utilized the technology, Cosgrove says: "The direction of our development is driven by the creativity and vision of those planners and partners who see the VoiceHive technology as an integral and growing part of their events."

Want an Actively Engaged Audience? Meetoo

Okay, so audience response technology is no longer uncharted territory in today's meetings and events landscape. But there's a reason for the uprising of apps that specialize in this service. Keeping an audience actively engaged and keeping communication lines open are vitally important to the success of modern meetings and events. But while many large-scale events are no stranger to this technology, expensive hardware and devices can limit its reach to the masses.

Enter **Meetoo**, a real-time messaging and polling app (native and Web) launched in July 2015 by Lumi to give all meetings and events the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of audience response solutions. Meetoo works within PowerPoint and includes all the benefits of traditional ARS, enabling collaboration from any location on any device, according to Simon C. Bryan, Lumi's managing director, Americas.

Boiled down, Meetoo offers two important, easy-to-use features. No. 1 is quick polls, which can get the pulse of a group in a matter of seconds. Planners can create polls on the fly or preprogram them with the PowerPoint add-in. No. 2 is messaging, which all participants can use to interact with one another without needing to refresh a screen. Participants can choose to be anonymous and planners can choose to moderate the messaging.

"Meetoo is the first audience response app of its kind to enable live polling and messaging for meetings of thousands of participants," Bryan says. "The option to comment and vote anonymously helps increase candor, participation and feedback—essential elements of any productive meeting. Meetoo's PowerPoint add-in makes live polling so easy that presenters can create polls and collect responses in seconds. The barrier between audience and presenter disappears with Meetoo, enabling true collaboration."

Lumi—a global company that specializes in real-time audience insight technology for research, live events, meetings and corporate communications—has an office in Minneapolis and has worked with local clients such as Mayo Clinic, Good Leadership Enterprises and Macalester College, as well as global names such as ebay, PwC and KPMG.

PHOTO: LUMI

Jeffrey Stelley, event support specialist at Mayo Clinic, has utilized Meetoo for pre- and post-tests to assess knowledge, speaker evaluations (for attendees to rate speakers) and to collect attendee demographics. "It's an interactive way for the audience to participate via audience response along with texting in questions submitted during the live session to the moderator," Stelley says. "We've went so far as to build a link through our attendee dashboard. They can see the materials for the meeting and participate in the web-based platform. It provides an easy solution for our events that are off campus and we're looking to ship minimal amounts of material."

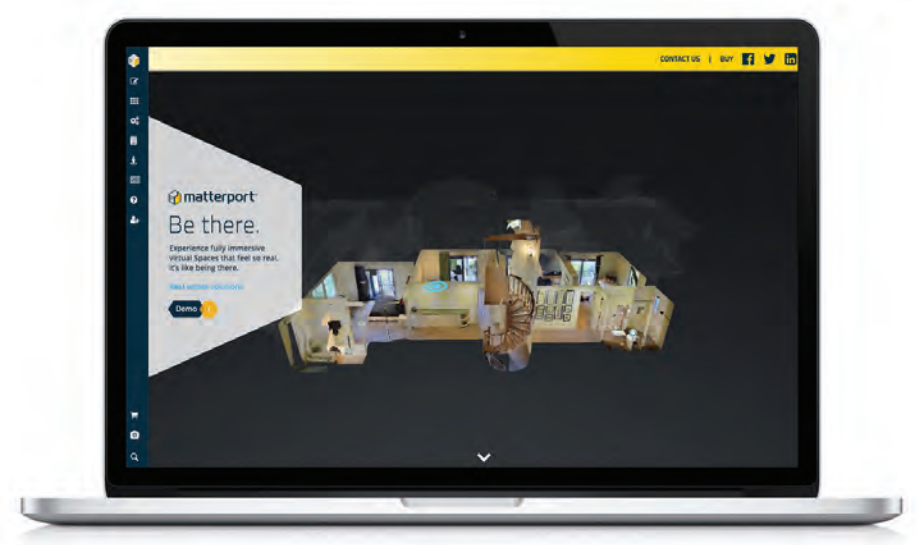
Stelley says the most important and unique feature of Meetoo is that it allows Mayo's cardiovascular meeting moderators to view and filter questions before answering in real time. "It allows good control of the meeting flavor and also control of the time," he says.

Bryan says Lumi is used in approximately six events per day across the globe. "Invariably by their nature, these are 'organized' meetings and events, which benefit from Lumi's technology and full-service of consultancy and on-site support," Bryan explains. "However in the U.S., there are an estimated 11 million formal meetings, and globally there are 30 million PowerPoint presentations per day. The vast majority would benefit from a cost-effective, unobtrusive, interactive tool that people can use themselves on their own devices with PowerPoint. That's where Meetoo comes in, and where Lumi sees growth from this SaaS offering."

A Marriage Made in Mapping Heaven

Enticing meeting and event planners to tour a college facility used to be a bit like pulling teeth. Derek Tonn learned this harsh reality when working in the collegiate conference and events business in the 1990s. "Many harbored reservations about the idea of holding the conferences, meetings, et al., on a university campus," Tonn says, "so getting them to visit and tour our properties was often a major challenge."

Tonn, who created maps and interior dia-



Can't make it to an open house? Matterport makes virtual facility tours possible.

grams part-time while working for Bethel College (now Bethel University) and the University of St. Thomas, was stuck. Standard online snapshots evolved into 360-degree panoramic photos, adding a little more reality to a digital display, yet there was still nothing that compared to physically touring a space. But with so many facility options, and openings in planners' busy schedules being fewer and farther between, who has time for that?

Tonn battled that dilemma continuously as he shifted his career to mapping full-time in 2000, founding **mapformation**, a custom cartography firm specializing in the creation of campus maps, city/area maps, and building interior (floor) diagrams for use in print, signage and electronic applications. It wasn't until just this past year that he discovered the answer he was looking for: **Matterport**, a company that specializes in immersive facility walkthroughs that are controlled by the user and are compatible with virtual reality software (such as Oculus VR, Microsoft HoloLens and Google Cardboard), with the ability to export models as OBJ files and manipulate them inside 3-D illustration software.

Tonn jumped all over it. Now as a Matterport Service Partner, mapformation pays Matterport to utilize its hardware, equipment, as well as its hosting and editing platform for immersive interactive walkthroughs of venues marketed to meeting and event planners, such as colleges, universities, hotels, resorts and museums.

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>
> **DEREK TONN, FOUNDER, MAPFORMATION**

"Prospective clients from anywhere in the world can virtually walk through facilities at any time they please from the comfort of their own home/office and internet-connected devices," Tonn explains. "It is a low-cost, low-risk method for meeting and event planners to explore said facilities. And, when they do come calling to the venues we are working with to develop immersive interactive walkthroughs, they are qualified leads. They already understand that we have the facilities to host a successful event. Now it's just a matter of negotiating on available dates and costs."

Some of mapformation's local clients include TPI Hospitality, which owns numerous hotels and conference centers throughout the state, and New Ulm Park and Recreation, which has hired Tonn to scan the interior of facilities such as the New Ulm Civic Center, New Ulm Community Center, Kiesling House and Riverside Park building. "We expect this to bring in more users/renters/customers and better satisfy existing users/renters/customers," says Thomas E. Schmitz, CPRP, director, Department of Park & Recreation, City of New Ulm, who says the interactive nature of allowing viewers to experience facilities and spaces virtually via their own tour is unique to anything the city has done before. "When new facilities are developed and existing facilities change, we plan to utilize Derek for more filming and scanning."

Next up on Tonn's agenda: spreading the word. "It's still relatively early in our efforts to promote immersive interactive walkthroughs to our current and prospective clients, and Matterport has primarily been working to promote their technology to realtors, to aid in their efforts to sell commercial and residential real estate," Tonn says. "I think the meetings and events industry is a superior market for said walkthroughs, and am working as aggressively as I can to help spread the word in various higher education associations, state and federal government agencies, and with a variety of municipal offices, hotels, resorts and museums. Almost everyone I have the opportunity to share the technology with is amazed at the possibilities it offers. And I think it will only be a matter of time until you see a large number of facilities offering said walkthroughs to their current and prospective clients."

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