



# 6Connex Helps AmericanHort Drive nearly 9,000 Visitors to Annual Virtual Event

With a 144-year history, AmericanHort is the leading national association for the green industry, representing 15,000 members and affiliated businesses including breeders, greenhouse and nursery growers, retailers, distributors, interior and exterior landscapers, florists, students, educators, researchers, and manufacturers. AmericanHort impacts industry growth through advocacy and education and it cultivates successful businesses by connecting the industry across states and segments to give members opportunities to expand their network and resources.

## The Challenge

For the last 90 years, AmericanHort has hosted Cultivate, the largest all-industry trade show and conference, attracting more than 10,000 professionals from as many as 40 countries to AmericanHort's hometown of Columbus, Ohio. Cultivate offers attendees access to hundreds of exhibitors, best-in-class tours, workshops, and the best professional development opportunities available in the industry. States AmericanHort president and CEO Ken Fisher, "Our team continues to work hard

to deliver the most relevant educational programming and showcase the industry's newest varieties and hottest trends in order to provide an exceptional Cultivate experience for all of our attendees, exhibitors, and speakers."

In early 2020, the AmericanHort team was finalizing plans for their largest event to date, with 650+ exhibitors and a packed agenda including a keynote presentation from world renowned author Jon Petz and a behind-the-scenes tour of the Columbus Zoo. Four months prior to the event, however, the COVID-19 outbreak made headlines worldwide, preventing travel for many.

Suddenly faced with the possibility that Cultivate could be canceled for the first time in its 90-year history, AmericanHort quickly learned everything they could about virtual events. States Karen Limbert, AmericanHort Vice President and Controller, "The Cultivate event is the event for every segment of the green industry. It's the preeminent resource for best practices, new plant varieties, and product innovation. AmericanHort members look forward to it and would certainly miss the opportunity to share, learn, and network, and we couldn't bear the thought of disappointing them. We knew enough to know there

might be a way to pull the event off virtually, and we threw all of our resources into figuring out how to accomplish it."

The first challenge was learning how to translate such an incredibly beautiful event, with thousands of live plants and large booths, into an engaging virtual experience. Mary Beth Cowardin, Vice President Marketing & Member Engagement remembers thinking, "There's no way we can replicate the sensory impact of this show online." But as the team met with 6Connex and began to understand the options available to them, they were reassured Cultivate's unique aesthetic would not be completely lost. In addition, several 6Connex features stood out:

- ▶ Custom branding
- ▶ User-friendly navigation
- ▶ 1:1 chats
- ▶ Attendee directory
- ▶ Multiple exhibitor booths and booth rep interaction functionality and booth styles
- ▶ Webcast sessions
- ▶ Live Q&As
- ▶ Opportunities for networking



## The Solution

Convinced the 6Connex virtual event platform was the best way forward, the AmericanHort team rolled up their sleeves and began to plan their virtual event. Although it would mean a highly compressed timeframe in which to build and launch the event, the team decided to keep the same dates originally planned for the physical event. States Cowardin, "We devoured all of the literature 6Connex provided to us, and we immediately started designing the virtual layout, crafting booth and sponsorship packages, building an agenda for the large number of educational sessions, etc. In fact, things were moving so quickly and coming together so well, we felt confident kicking off our external marketing campaigns early in the process."

## The Results

AmericanHort secured 250 exhibitors and almost 9,000 registrants, and on July 13th, Cultivate opened its virtual doors to wide acclaim. The show attracted nearly 6,000 unique attendees, 30% of whom were brand new to Cultivate. In addition, the event averaged 3,000 visitors a day and received positive feedback. Said Cowardin, "The show exceeded expectations. Our members didn't expect a 3D environment in which they could visit multiple rooms, and they were surprised by how easy it was to reunite with old friends and make new ones through the engagement tools. Exhibitors were happy at the metrics provided, making following up on leads an easier process for many. Exhibitors had an average of 500 visitors to each booth."

One of the highlights of the event was the tHRlve Garden Party hosted by AmericanHort's foundation, the Horticultural Research Institute. This gathering replaced the typical in-person fundraiser with great video content developed by the AmericanHort team. The fundraiser event surpassed its goals, and the donations to the Horticultural Research Institute will be used to support research that benefits the horticulture industry and to fund scholarships to future industry leaders.

Summarizes Cowardin, "Without the constraints of a physical event, we actually expanded our reach. And then... we put on a show! It was a great first impression."



## About 6Connex

6Connex is the leading provider of virtual event solutions. Our secure, cloud-based platform expands audience reach and drives in-depth content engagement for marketing, sales, recruitment, training, and HR communities.

Our product portfolio includes virtual environments, learning management, and webinars.

**For more information visit**  
**[www.6connex.com](http://www.6connex.com), or call 1-800-395-4702.**