

Inspiration and innovation for RAF conference as Lumi Insights brings the dialogue alive

"As the Royal Air Force approaches its centenary in 2018, it's important that we look back to our history, but we also must also look forward to the next 100 years," says Group Captain Paul Wilkins. "It was, therefore, important to explore some new ways of doing things."

Gp Capt Wilkins is responsible for designing the RAF's Air Power Conference. This is a high profile annual event and a major part of the RAF's engagement activity. It is attended by the Chief of the Air Staff and up to 500 delegates, including visiting air chiefs from around the world. Its purpose is to address issues of mutual concern among the air power community.

Challenge – To maximise the effect, but minimise risk



The conference has always taken a traditional path. However, this year's event had 'inspiration and innovation' as the theme, signalling that it was, perhaps, time to change. It was also held in a different venue; the IET, Savoy Place, London. This offered far more digital potential than previous venues, so there were no barriers to the introduction of technology.

One of the areas in particular that Gp Capt Wilkins wanted to address was the 'Any Questions?' slot at the end of each of the four main sessions. "Traditionally, at the end of every session, the chair asks for questions from the floor. You may get one or two hands go up, but people tend to be reluctant.

"At this particular conference there were some very senior people, but at the same time some junior staff too, so this reticence is understandable. Then you have the other side of the problem – those who can't wait to take centre stage, but who rarely ask the best questions. With such limited time for Q&A we felt that our use of the Lumi Insights allowed the Session Chairs to quickly and easily identify the key themes that delegates wanted more information on thereby maximising our Q&A experience.

The Solution – Live streaming and live questions

This year's first big change was that conference was livestreamed across the RAF to increase participation and engagement, whether delegates were physically at the conference or at a remote location.

Then, the conference used the Lumi Event App to help enhance audience interaction. Within the app, the 'Live Insights' feature enabled delegates, including those attending the conference remotely, to send questions to the chair as each of the four or five sessions progressed. These were then moderated – to minimise the risk of inappropriate comments and questions – and the audience had the opportunity to 'like' the ones they felt reflected their questions too.

The Results – A surprising live dialogue

"Bear in mind this was a significant change of direction for us," says Group Captain Wilkins. "But it really worked well in the end." He adds that, at the end of each session, there were up to 30 good questions. Those that had wanted to ask a similar question could 'like' the original and this meant that the chair of the session could assess the questions and answer those that most interested the audience.

"Perhaps we could only answer 12 questions, but through the live feature we could see that, say, 25 had 'liked' some of those questions – in other words they had wanted to ask it themselves – so we knew we were steering the conference content in the right direction. It meant the time was being used on topics that were the most important to delegates and this is where the application added value for us."

The questions came in during the session rather than after, so by the time they reached the Q&A part of the proceedings the chair had already been able to assess the mood of the audience.

Although delegates had given their identity to sign onto the app, the questions were relatively anonymous at the time of asking, so it meant that they were far less inhibited, than if they had been asked to put up their hand, for example. Also, because delegates had to quickly type the question out as text, it meant it had to be thought through as a question and wasn't just a comment.

Some presenters even asked Group Captain Wilkins to forward the questions to them to help them shape future talks and sessions. He also says that there was a change as time went on and delegates became increasingly comfortable with the Lumi technology. "By the time we got to the later sessions and post-event they were not just putting forward questions but also their opinions on how they could be solved," he reports.

"The Lumi Event App enabled us to build up an engaging, live dialogue throughout the event; something that we hadn't predicted. What we set out to achieve for the conference was bold and ambitious and in the main we achieved our goal, although we have learnt some lessons along the way.

"If we use a livestream again we would definitely use this technology as provided by companies such as Lumi to give us that direct interaction. It certainly brought the conference to life for many of our delegates."

