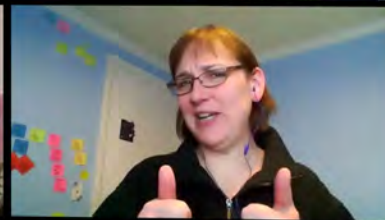




AITD 2020 ROUNDUP



Of all the things that our contingency planning covered, the news that a Hollywood star had been diagnosed with a recently discovered virus was quite low on the list of things we thought might derail the AITD conference.

But, as 2020 has proven, anything is possible.



Looking back now, when ‘lockdown’, ‘isolation’ and ‘social distancing’ are all part of our vernacular, it’s hard to remember a time when COVID-19 wasn’t quite so present in our lives.

It was certainly on our radar in the weeks leading up to the conference – we were reviewing government advice daily, had discussed increased cleaning practices with the venue, stocked up on hand sanitiser and had even started to explore live streaming facilities with the AV team, just in case – yet the prospect of the entire event being thwarted by this emerging virus had seemed fairly remote. Even a week out from the conference, we’d had a handful of people pull out due to changes in company travel policies or underlying health conditions but the vast majority of our delegates, speakers and sponsors had indicated they were keen to go ahead and government regulations were giving us the green light.

For the AITD team, the moment a news notification announcing Tom Hank’s coronavirus diagnosis pinged up on a phone in the office will always be remembered as the point when we knew this was going to be no ordinary conference. Just the previous day in a planning meeting, our MC, Suzy Jacobs, had mentioned that she had spent time chatting to Tom at a Sydney Opera House event a few days earlier. After some frantic trawling through the NSW Health website for the implications of this chance encounter, it soon became clear that Suzy had a 2-week, enforced staycation to look forward to and we were without an MC...

From there, things snowballed rapidly; within 48 hours the World Health Organisation had declared a pandemic, the Melbourne Grand Prix was cancelled and the Australian government imposed restrictions on gatherings over 500. While this final edict did not affect our conference of less than 500 attendees, we knew that

we could not, in good conscience, put the health of our delegates, speakers or staff at risk.

And so, 4 days before AITD 2020 was due to kick off – on a Friday the 13th of all days – we found ourselves back at the drawing board, trying to figure out how to translate months of planning for a face-to-face event into a successful virtual conference. Since then, we’ve been asked numerous times how we did it and what advice we’d give to another organisation looking to do the same. The honest answers to those questions would be ‘fuelled by an obscene amount of junk food’ and ‘don’t’ respectively!

The truth is we probably couldn’t have done this so quickly outside of the L&D community; few other professions would have had the agility and understanding to get on board with such a massive change in such a short time.

Our speakers were overwhelmingly



11:30am, Friday 13 March



5:30pm, Tuesday 17 March

supportive and their ability to embrace the new format – particularly those who told us they had never presented virtually before – is a testament to the L&D profession. Special kudos must go to our keynote speaker, Ger Driesen, who was determined to deliver his presentation, despite being on the second leg of his flight to Sydney when the change in format was announced and then had to fly back home 2 days later when it looked likely that Dutch borders would close.

We are also lucky to have an incredible team who, once the initial shock had worn off (softened by a quick run to Subway...), rolled up their sleeves and pulled together like never before. There may not have been much sleep for some of us but there were certainly lots of laughs along the way.

Ultimately though, none of it would have been possible without the amazing response from our delegates. Having fully braced ourselves for

some level of backlash, the messages we received full of support, good wishes and encouragement were extraordinary and unexpected. Knowing we had so many people cheering us on definitely kept us going over those few days. With such a short time to turn things around, it was never going to be perfect. But even through the occasional technical glitch, a Q&A system that didn't work quite how we thought it would and a program that barely left time to breathe (let alone take a bathroom break!), our attendees were not only patient with us but managed to bring so much enthusiasm that at times we could imagine we were all in one room together.

Hopefully, when AITD 2021 rolls around, we will all be in one room together. With AITD's 50th anniversary coming up next year, we plan to be bigger and better than ever – and not even Tom Hanks will be able to stop us! We can't wait to see you there.

We'd like to say a very special thank you to all the speakers who stayed on board for our virtual journey. Each and every one of these extraordinary beings took the short notice change of format in their stride and delivered amazing content:

- Gina Brooks
- Peter Clowes
- Ger Driesen
- Alistair Gordon
- Peter Hawkins
- Dr Connie Henson
- Andrew Horabin
- Steve Kimmens
- Dr Amanda Lizier
- Capt Tony Mullan
- Michelle Ockers
- Terry Reynolds
- Chemène Sinson
- Tony Sloman
- Kestrel Stone
- Megan Torrance
- Tania Tytherleigh
- Trish Uhl
- Neil Von Heupt
- Naomi Waldron
- Cheryle Walker

SUZY JACOBS: MC EXTRAORDINAIRE

Every cloud has a silver lining and, without doubt, our fabulous MC, Suzy Jacobs, brought the sparkle to AITD 2020. Having been temporarily benched following her aforementioned evening of schmoozing with Hollywood celebrities and subsequent quarantine, the move to a virtual conference meant Suzy was back in the starting line-up, albeit from the safe distance of her apartment. The incredible energy and vibrancy that she injected into the proceedings brought the conference alive in a way we hadn't dared possible and we can't thank her enough!





#AITD2020 ON TWITTER

As always, the conference backchannel on Twitter was animated and engaging. Here are a few of our favourite tweets:

@gv_media

Just a shout out to all the incredible people at #AITD2020 who managed to get the Covid19-impacted conference off the ground as a virtual event in what has got to be Guinness World Record time! Well done everyone involved!

@NigelDoyle7

Thanks from Navy to all involved in making #AITD2020 happen. The team at AITD is amazing to have pulled it off with such a short prep time, showing innovation and agility we can all aspire to.

@NeilVonHeupt

#AITD2020. We change lives! Good L&D has an impact on individuals, their life, the organisation, the economy. It's a high calling!

@JulianDavis71

Massive effort by all involved to get the #AITD2020 moved to a complete virtual conference. You've set a benchmark for others to follow. Thank you @aitd1

@SuzyJacobs

Self-isolation doesn't mean social isolation. Surrounded by amazing people having awesome conversations #aitd2020

@weezynz

#AITD2020 thank you everyone I have really enjoyed the last 2 days and all the speakers. Really helpful to get so much info and tips to pass on about teams working from home in this current environment. Great effort and now it's happy hour. Looking forward to next year. @aitd1

AITD 2020 STATISTICS

2 BUSINESS DAYS

to pivot from face-to-face to virtual.

21 SPEAKERS

who stuck with us for the new format.

4 SPEAKERS

who joined us live from Luna Park.

15 HOURS AND 55 MINUTES

of live stream.

18 COFFEE CUPS

surrounding our CEO, Lynette, by the end of the stream (*for those who were keeping tabs!*)

47 HOURS

Ger Driesen spent on a plane to spend a rainy weekend in Sydney.

1 DELEGATE

who missed all the notification emails because they were travelling and turned up to the venue (*and is now the proud owner of an AITD 2020 t-shirt!*)

756KG

approximate weight of the pizza and doughnuts eaten by the AITD team in the days leading up to AITD 2020.

We would like to thank our conference partners who made AITD 2020 possible through their invaluable support:

