Digital Transformation in the MICE Industry (Powered by Zoho Backstage)

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Abstract: Business challenges happen to operating MICE events nowadays due to the pandemics and the globalization. The management of event planner company needs to improve the performance of the organization by implementing innovations and technologies to survive the business during this situation. ZOHO Backstage is one of the options that event business can apply to operate a digital event with many features related. The objectives of this study are to study the features of ZOHO Backstage, and to provide the knowledge and technological awareness. This web-based event application features are including registration, event stakeholder management (event planning team members, speakers, attendees, sponsorships, and exhibitors), marketing tools, and data analytics. The finding of this study showed that participants who attended the workshop were agree that ZOHO Backstage is one option to use for the MICE event business related to the features together with its characteristics in security and privacy, application performance, and ease of implementation due to the advantages of cloud-based system. Practically the finding of this study will also help event planning company and related organization to improve the knowledge and skills in event application, and able to support the business in the future. This application will be one of the options for them to have competitive advantages for MICE industry.

Keywords: MICE application, Web-based application, ZOHO backstage, MICE industry

Introduction

Challenges in business operation are spreading around the globe. Many companies need to make change during unstable situation such as shutting the offices and requiring most of employees to work remotely at home in the situation of covid 19 pandemic. Business travelers did not have a chance to travel across the boundary to meet the clients. The participants can not join the professional conference. Exhibitors were not able to show their products and business showcases in the trade fair. During this crisis, event professionals were freezing and trying to find the options to do the business. Digital transformation is helping industries to improve the way they do businesses. Opportunities and challenges during this information era, transformation and upgrading in technologies related are urgency for the MICE industry.

Implementing Technology to MICE Industry

MICE industry is investing in the use of technology, from applications to various channels, in organizing and implementing their events. Right event management tools can empower organizers to push boundaries in delivering events and boost customer experience. To resume the business, virtual event became a great deal for MICE industry. To operate the business during the pandemic and strengthen the technological platform in the business, Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) launched the Virtual Meeting Space (VMS) to support organizers to stage their meetings via webinar and hold exhibitions on O2O (Offline to Online) platform. Furthermore, TCEB has set up the TCEB COVID-19 Center and portal to provide real-time and up-to-

date information for both domestic and international target groups. (Corporate Image and Communication Department &Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, 2020).

Trend in MICE industry is not only focusing on technological implementation and sustainable event management, but also the perspective in the concept of Personalization (One to One Marketing). This strategy implements from the stage of registration to engage attendees which match to their preferences. Refer to the implementation of "Attendee Journey Mapping" which is the personalization concept in Reed Exhibition (Professional Exhibition Organization), this strategy can fulfil attendees and participants needs by understanding target, collecting related data, and merge related data to the target. The other concept to adjust attendees' experiences is Festivalization which focusing on the identity to make memorable experiences that need to match with personalization concept. (Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, 2020). Technology transformation can be the strategy to improve event experiences through appropriate technology by using the web-based application to merge data from various channels to promote the business to attendees in the future. This innovation will operate as well as manage MICE business in the global trend.

Digital Event

Digital Event has its specific elements that need to focus on the knowledge (content), networking and community engagement (by using the interactive components), marketplace experience (commerce and tradeshow that most closely to a face-to-face exhibition). (International Association of Exhibitions and Events, 2021) Event planner need to keep in mind that who the attendees are to create an inclusive experience fosters belonging for all. These features in each element such as registration, dealing with speakers, streaming, voting, chat and meeting function, matchmarking must be concerned to developing the application.

Today, employees as well as customers expect and demand to be able to use a web-based application due to the accessibility and work sharing in terms of obtaining information and performing transactions anywhere at any time. These make application service providers need to design and develop web-based application, mobile application, information systems based on the advantages of web technology in this era.

Zoho, trusted by over 75 million users globally such as Philips, Daimler, and Hyatt, is one of the unique and powerful suites of application running the business. This cloud-based application is the trend for companies to shift more of their information technology infrastructures especially storage and processing. Startups and small companies with limited IT resources and budgets will find public cloud services especially helpful. (Laudon & Laudon, 2022). Zoho provide business application solutions covering sales and marketing, customer services, finance and accounting, human resources, office automations, business intelligence and analytics, and related information technology infrastructures.

Zoho Backstage is an event management software that empowers event organizers to plan and run conferences, meetups, and product launches with greater efficiency and impact. (Zoho Corporation Private Limited, 2022). This web-based application will help MICE event professionals to operate and create events especially for online, and hybrid event. Application features can be shown in the event step staring from creating an event by adding up its details, agendas, sessions, team members, sponsorship, exhibitors. Then designing the microsite which will be a tool to engage the attendees, and related event stakeholders. Microsite does not only provide information related to the event, but also assists prospects to the registration platform that link to the automated payment systems. In terms of sales and marketing, they can use this site to promote event by sharing on social media, banner ads, scheduling email communication and advertising with affiliate link. (Zoho Corporation Private Limited, 2022). During the event, event organizers can implement this application by its own live broadcasting platform to live broadcast the sessions, run presentations, share handout related to webinar, interact with attendees and participants. Managing the event, attendee check-in monitor, ticket sold, progress tracker, integrating to Zoho SalesIQ.

One of the success stories in implementing Zoho Backstage to MICE event business is the LeBros (Agency in Vietnam). This application makes business convenient, advance, and smart. Mr. Quốc Vinh, Group Chairman and CEO, mentioned that Backstage engage their attendees and keep them updated on the latest news by discussion forums and announcements. It enabled audiences to connect virtually with the speakers in real time. They were now able to ask questions and see them answered right away. Backstage also helped them create a tailor-made event website which is the microsite that mentioned above. This website is not only served as a marketing vehicle and avenue to sell tickets, but also engaged speakers and managed sessions to help draw a bigger audience. (Zoho Corporation Private Limited, 2022).

Digital Transformation in the MICE Industry Workshop

Refer to the information mentioned above, providing the workshop was an alternative to demonstrate the characteristics and performance of the application. Zoho Backstage was used as an application to conduct this workshop. The arrangement for program session is illustrated in Table 1. The selected workshop's speakers were from the application service provider and the lecturer in technology and innovation in MICE industry. They have been the expertise with knowledge, skills, and experiences in business process implementation and its product.

Table 1. Program agenda

Date/Time	Topic Session	Speakers
May 7th, 2022		
09.30-10.00	Opening and Introduction	Ekkaphot Chudet (Marketing Consultant)
10.00-11.00	Digital transformation in the MICE industry (Powered by Zoho Backstage)	Khoo Chia Ching (Regional Marketing Manager)
11.00-11.45	Equipping Event Organizers with Zoho Backstage	Chelsy Nepomuceno (Marketing Consultant)
13.00-15.30	Backstage Workshop	Krishna Kumar (Regional Sales Manager), and Prathik Bathija (Product Marketing Manager)
May 8th, 2022		
09.00-12.00	Workshop Session: BackStage for Real Events	Ekkaphot Chudet (Marketing Consultant)
13.00-15.00	Review & Evaluation	Passakorn Chumpoonta (Technology in MICE Instructor)

Implementing Information System in Business

Information technology implementation in the business often remains a persistent and troubling gap between the inherent value of the technology now a day. This challenge should be closed by developing the applications that closed to the nature of business, and its ability to put into work effectively. To select the application in the firm, the management as a change maker need to concern for user satisfaction which related to business result. The factors that make users satisfied are data authenticity, reliability, security, reactivity, processing time, integrity, and system flexibility. These factors can be grouped to usefulness, security, responsiveness, and agility. (Wen & Kim, 2021). The selecting criteria is not focusing only users, but also functional features, technical (information technology infrastructure), quality (capability of managing information at different levels of interactions) and cost. (Cricelli et. al., 2019) The application with these characteristics mentioned will be the option for business to invest and implement in the organization to gain the competitive advantages.

Method

Research Objective

The objectives of this research are (1) to study the features of ZOHO Backstage that can be implement to MICE industry, and (2) to provide the knowledge and technological awareness by using web based event application for MICE industry.

Research Methodology

This study focuses on reviewing the features of Zoho Backstage that can implement to MICE industry. Data use in this research is not only retrieving the information related, but also collecting from questionnaire, pre-test and post-test of the participants. 32 participants in this workshop included professional event organizers, instructors, and students in the major field of MICE industry. Online workshop "Digital Transformation in the MICE Industry (Powered by Zoho Backstage)" took place on May 7th - 8th, 2022. Data analysis in comparison of learning achievement from the tests was using statistical computation of averages and standard deviations. So that t-tests can be conducted on testing of an assumption applicable to a population in terms of degrees of freedom to determine the statistical significance.

Furthermore, performance and features of application as well as workshop satisfaction were using the descriptive statistics from questionnaires after the workshop. Suggestions were from the interview of the different types of participants.

Results and Discussion

Participants of this workshop were 17 students (53.10%), 7 instructors and educational support staffs (21.90%), and 8 event professional (25.00%), totally 32 participants. The results are demonstrated in 3 parts: learning achievement (from pre-test and post-test), application capacity and satisfaction (from questionnaires and interview). Details are illustrated as following.

Learning Achievement

Learning achievement of this workshop was concerned in knowledge which can be divided into 3 parts: digital transformation in MICE industry (score of 3), equipping event organizer with Backstage (score of 2), and Zoho Backstage workshop (score of 5). T-test analsis in each pre-test and post-test scores is illustrated as table 2. The result shows that participants achieved the knowledge learned at statistically significant (0.00).

Table 2. t-test analysis comparison of pre-test and post-test score.

	Pre-test		Post-test		t	p	Mean difference	SE difference
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
Part I: Digital Transformation in MICE Industry	0.75	0.62	2.34	0.48	11.9	<0.001	1.59	0.134
Part II: Equipping event organizer with Backstage	0.44	0.50	1.78	0.42	12.6	<0.001	1.34	0.106
Part III: Zoho Backstage workshop	1.56	0.88	4.69	0.47	18.8	<0.001	3.13	0.166

This result shows that participants had the knowledge for the concept of digital transformation and how Zoho Backstage support them to operate the digital event or virtual event. Furthermore, participants had a chance to practice by using the case study to generate digital event. The workshop did not only make all participants understand application features, but also technological skills in information technology together with digital web-based event application.

Application Capacity

Participants rated the scores for Zoho Backstage in each capacity. They agreed that this application has highly effective capacity in all features related, mostly in security and privacy, application performance, and easy to implementation. Details are illustrated as Table 3.

Table 3. Score rating for Zoho Backstage capability

Application Capacity	Mean	SD	Result
1) Relevant to event business	4.59	0.62	Very high
2) Covering tasks in event business	4.22	0.79	High
3) Supporting to event business process	4.50	0.71	Very high
4) User interface design	4.47	0.76	High
5) Application performance	4.72	0.63	Very high
6) Application responsiveness	4.41	0.91	High
7) Compatibility to other systems	4.19	0.93	High
8) Ease of implementation	4.66	0.65	Very high
9) Ease of maintenance	4.28	0.81	High
10) Security and privacy	4.78	0.55	Very high

Regarding to the result illustrated, the highest rank in system capacity was in the top 3 which were security and privacy, application performance, and easy to implementation. These are the characteristics of cloud-based application. Cloud computing environments provide advantages in the form of security, administration of

resources, and its execution. Task scheduling in cloud systems is resource management which aims to enhance execution of assignments and usage of resources in cloud systems. (Sharma & Rashid, 2020)

"It is easy to use, just only drag and drop" was the comment from students in technology and innovation in MICE course who attend this workshop. It also has features to create the conference due to the registration module and web casting and documents sharing regarding to the lesson learn. In the view of expertise and event professional, this application is user friendly and can assist team to monitor the attendees' registration through the revenue management. During executing the event, the web streaming can run smoothly from both the wireless network and mobile hotspot sharing.

Participants of this workshop had their own account to create the event with assigned case study. Furthermore, they had another one-time event for each account for free of charge. Feedbacks from users were similar to the findings that mention above. The additional suggestions were speakers and the sponsorship management. In speaker management module, it can help event organizer to contact speaker automatically, update speaker profile, store speaker information to the centralized database, and queue the speaker during the event. In term of sponsorship management, this application could make the sponsorship engagement. It allows event professional team to classify the sponsors, provide the appropriate package, and manage their requests. Due to the database platform, the management can summarize and allocate sponsorship in the highest satisfaction level. This snapshot of current and past events and their management were the archiving of information which can be time consuming to operate the next future event. (O'Toole, 2022).

In addition to the information in Table 3 and interviewing from the related parties, participants suggested that this application contains the features which relevant to event business and support tasks in MICE event operating. The capability was created nearly every function of event management such as registration, polling and real-time feedback surveys, ticketing and access control, marketing and advertising of events and sub events. These are many benefits for event professional. Exhibitors can track the lead retrieval through the virtual exhibition booths. Attendees expected the availability of speedy, useful, and navigate application while at the event due to the environmentally friendly of the application. (Ball et. al., 2019).

Utilising online data from the system gains deeper understanding towards event attendees, sponsors, and related stakeholders. Apply data science concept can offer valuable insights. (Celuch, 2021). For instance, analysis of data stored in the system can not only predict trends and provide recommendations to event participants, it also uncovers the right target audience for organisers to streamline management, optimise networking, and personalise experiences. They could obtain the benefits of data analysis from event stakeholder management module including event planning team members, speakers, attendees, sponsorships, and exhibitors.

Due to the characteristics for the speed to production and reduced costs, environmental issues and revenue generation, the management can have the competitive advantages through these features and characteristics. They will analyze data to track each attendee's journey and set strategy for each target. Event planners have tools and technology to assist them to work smoothly and serve attendees with highest satisfaction.

Workshop Satisfaction

Satisfaction rating are highly score in all items. Participants were satisfying most in knowledge transferring, language using, and understanding the content from speakers, follow by the readiness of internet signal, and content related. Details are illustrated as Table 4.

Table 4. Satisfaction

Satisfaction	Mean	SD	Result
1) Knowledge transferring, language using, and understanding	4.72	0.45	Very high
2) Relevant and appropriate content	4.41	0.62	High
3) Answering questions from trainer	4.25	0.76	High
4) Technical readiness: Visual signal	4.22	0.56	High
5) Technical readiness: Sound signal	4.34	0.75	High
6) Technical readiness: Internet signal	4.47	0.71	High
7) Public relations of the workshop	4.16	0.92	High
8) Knowledge utilization	4.34	0.87	High

Participants satisfied the content more when comparing with technical readiness and the operating for this workshop. They had satisfied in knowledge that they obtain. Knowledge transferring and language using from speakers made participants understanding. They also had aware in the technological issues during digitalized era from expertise. The appropriate speaker management from application in speaker management module did not only matched the expertise to the session, but also speaker information providing. Selected speakers were professional in each topic session.

The content was relevant and appropriate for participants. Content provided in this workshop was separated to the session. Beginning with providing information followed by step by step demonstrating as well as practicing from the case study. Learning by doing is the best way to make learners clearly understand. This method was the advantages for them and could make them keep in touch with the application. Content design was the reason why they can utilize their knowledge and skills to apply in their daily life especially in event operation and MICE business.

The lowest satisfaction was public relation for this workshop. The information was announced 2 weeks before launching through Facebook (Hospitality Technology Innovation SUT), curriculum website, and the Line application group. This issue needs to be improved when operating workshops or trainings in the future.

Conclusion

Zoho Backstage is web-based application which using the cloud-based system for event business. It has the features related to the event operation and management. Beginning with event planning, event planner can create the event by adding event and related stakeholders' information to the system. Next step is generating revenue by providing microsite to promote event and the online registration. During the event execution, live steaming and virtual exhibition booths fulfil the virtual event nearly the on-site event. Finally, event professionals can evaluate the event by surveys and all information tracking provided by this application. This event web-based application can be a choice for MICE professionals to implement virtual event.

To make sure that Zoho Backstage has features required for MICE professional, providing application capacity information to target group is needed. Workshop session launched for the participants for students who study MICE technology, instructors, and MICE professional can be the suitable solution. They knew all features and practiced during the workshop. Since they familiarized with it, they suggested that this application has good performance and security cause of characteristic in cloud-based system. In addition, Zoho Backstage's features cover tasks and activities in MICE event operation and management.

Participants had high level of satisfaction especially in knowledge gained from expertise. Speaker management can be a tool to use when operating event for high satisfaction. The content from this workshop can be applied for MICE industry. However, public relation and event executing should be improved for future events.

Recommendations

This study was focused about features and capability of Zoho Backstage for MICE industry. There are another applications and technologies sub-branched to study more about their features and capabilities. Future studies should encourage more participants from various part which related to MICE industry to join the workshop. More number of participants will have more suggestions and ideas.

Scientific Ethics Declaration

The author declares that the scientific ethical and legal responsibility of this article published in EPESS journal belongs to the author.

Acknowledgements or Notes

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