



Interview with Shannon C. Reed, Electrochemical Society

**For podcast release
Monday, May 24, 2021**

KENNEALLY: The Electrochemical Society, founded in Philadelphia in 1902, welcomed Thomas Edison among its very first members. Gordon Moore shared the reasoning for his namesake law of computing power at a 1964 ECS meeting in San Francisco. And the 2019 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for the development of lithium-ion batteries was awarded to ECS members John B. Goodenough, M. Stanley Whittingham, and Akira Yoshino.

Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for Velocity of Content. Electrochemistry helps generate much more than power for billions of devices. From batteries to sensors to luminescent displays, electrochemical processes drive our digital revolution. More than 8,000 scientists and engineers in over 85 countries routinely shared research and discoveries at Electrochemical Society gatherings for decades, until the coronavirus pandemic turned out the lights last spring.

The society's PRIME 2020 meeting, a quadrennial occasion that had last attracted 3,000 attendees from the US, Japan, and Korea, was threatened with cancellation. Shannon C. Reed, ECS director of community engagement, handled the program's rewiring as a virtual event. He joins me now to share the results and his thoughts on the future of conferences in a post-COVID era. Welcome to Velocity of Content, Shannon Reed.

REED: Thank you, Chris.

KENNEALLY: Well, we appreciate you joining us, because this is a challenge many organizations have faced during this pandemic period, Shannon, which is the so-called pivot – the famous pivot from the physical to the virtual. There are a lot of lessons being learned, and I think as we begin to see our way out of this crisis, we all expect to see continuing hybrid events and virtual events as a part of the mix.

Shannon Reed, you faced this challenge with the PRIME 2020 meeting. What happened once the pandemic struck?

REED: ECS was in a critical state, in the sense of – we had to cancel our spring 2020 meeting that was supposed to occur in Montréal, Canada. Typically, our biannual meetings have anywhere from 2,000 to 3,000 people. Just because of the coronavirus pandemic, that spring meeting, the only option was to cancel.



So our quadrennial meeting, as you had mentioned, was PRIME 2020. That is a partnered meeting where the Electrochemical Society hosts and facilitates the meetings of the Electrochemical Society of Japan and the Korean Electrochemical Society to bring electrochemists from ECS and those other two organizations together to discuss their research. It is our largest meeting, and we had anticipated having over 4,000 attendees in 2020.

We made the decision to pivot to digital over the summer and very quickly had to turn around an infrastructure that would support a digital meeting. That was leveraged greatly by our meetings team that's headed by John Lewis, our director of meetings. Then there was some other internal infrastructure items that we needed to take care of on our end through community engagement.

KENNEALLY: Talk about the logistics, Shannon Reed. There was a lot involved here that is not the typical meeting challenges, right? You had to do a significant investment in IT, and this meant some real changes, not just in the back end, but the front end in terms of how presenters would be making their presentations.

REED: Yeah. So we made a significant investment in our IT, in that we had a single sign-on project scheduled, so that way our presenters and our attendees would be able to use their ECS login credentials for the meeting platform that we would be using, which was through Conference Exchange. So we had to accelerate our single sign-on project that was scheduled to be completed in December of 2020 to be completed in August of 2020, and anyone that's done an IT project lift like that knows that that is a bear of a project acceleration to manage.

So we successfully did it and were able to launch a PRIME 2020 meeting digitally with single sign-on – huge investment in our IT infrastructure – and then also allowing for our digital meeting aspect and presenters being able to upload video recordings, slide decks through presentation platforms like PowerPoint.

KENNEALLY: I just want to drill down a little bit, because this SSO, this single sign-on program that needed to be accelerated, that was an important piece of it. But explain for people who might not be familiar why that was critical, why that made the user experience so much better in the end.

REED: Yeah, it brings everybody into the organization through one single platform. They're not having to use multiple different login credentials. They're able to log in through ECS's landing page and then go straight to the Conference Exchange platform to view content, whether that's videos, slide decks, etc., and engage with the community through our symposia sessions, our live events.



And then also we held large live events once every day, which was a bit of a challenge, because finding a time that works for those members in the US and members in Japan, China, and Korea is a little difficult. So all of our live programming was at 8:00 PM at night for most of the people that are here on the East Coast, and then that translated to the morning for the Asia and Pacific partners.

KENNEALLY: That's really interesting, right? Because when we have a physical space, we're all together. We're in one place. But with this virtual environment, everyone can be anywhere. So suddenly, you have to start thinking about time zones and questions of availability that just really don't exist in the physical world.

REED: Correct, yeah. And as we continue to look at what that virtual, hybrid component looks like, we know that the digital component, people are going to be able to access any time regardless of their time zone. It's also being able to broadcast and provide that live content that really brings the community together for those discussions and figuring out what works best for our partners in our global community.

KENNEALLY: So a critical piece of doing something live is to bring together the community and to have them interact with each other. How did that work?

REED: It was a bit of a challenge, but we held, like I had mentioned, live events every day. On the first day of the digital conference, we held an opening reception, almost ceremony, to kick off the meeting. Stuck to our original live event programming, such as our plenary speaker – that is the second day of the meeting, on Monday. And then to close out the meeting, we also held a Nobel laureate event where we were able to feature M. Stanley Whittingham and Akira Yoshino talking about their experience through their careers and leading up to the Nobel Prize. Then at the end of our meeting, we actually held an event, our honors and awards program, where we recognized all of our recipients of awards from our really robust honors and awards program that we have. We have over 60 awards for the society. So it was a really great way to bring the community together.

I think we had outstanding participation – not just during the live sessions, but also with accessing content on our Conference Exchange platform that we had left open for a month. So people weren't necessarily chained down to being at a meeting that's running from 7:00 in the morning until 9:00 at night when we were talking about presentations and receptions and live programming.

Then we also recorded the live events, so if people couldn't attend the live event that was occurring, they would be able to watch it the next day and still be able to engage in the community. And then as they were going through the presentation materials, whether that



was video, slide decks, etc., they had an opportunity to email the presenter or the symposia organizer and ask them questions about their research. So it still, although not an in-person conversation, allowed for the community to connect in a really great way.

KENNEALLY: The other thing that you did that is really a hybrid is to look at the business model. So for presenters – for the authors who were registering to present – you used what we can call an open-access model, APCs, which means in a typical journal environment article processing charges. But I guess this would be more author processing charges, right? So they were the ones who paid, but all attendees were able to register at no cost. That meant you got a tremendous turnout.

REED: It was a tremendous turnout, and I think that's something that ECS is really proud of, in being able to stay committed to our mission of disseminating the research and advancing the science. Our typical meeting attendee ratio to presenter is everybody that attends our meeting at some point is presenting during the meeting, so it's a 1:1 ratio. And with the pivot to digital and only charging the presenters, and obviously a fee that was much less than an in-person meeting, we were still able to derive revenue – which I think a lot of associations struggled with in 2020 in a virtual capacity – but then, like you had mentioned, our attendees could register for the meeting for free and access the content.

That really increased our attendance rate. We would have normally had a 3,000- to 4,000-person meeting, and we had 7,000 people, including the presenters. We're talking 4,000 more people than we would have normally had accessing the content, coming to our community, engaging with our presenters. And that was a really great statistic for us, and obviously commitment to our organization and mission.

KENNEALLY: As I said at the start, we're all looking forward to getting away from the pandemic, seeing it behind us. Yet what we will have with us for the future is this hybrid situation of both virtual and physical presentations and conferences and meetings and offices. So I wonder if you can reflect a bit, Shannon Reed, on what that's going to mean to ECS and how you think it may shape your programs in the future, because I see that you do have scheduled currently a meeting for this fall in Orlando, Florida. So you are hoping to be back in the physical space. But will you be also trying to work in the lessons from this virtual experience?

REED: Most definitely. That meeting that is currently scheduled in Orlando is going to be a hybrid meeting. So there will be an in-person component. That's what we're planning for. We're seeing a lot of other organizations transition back to the in-person meeting environment. And there will be the digital component, making it a hybrid meeting. So we'll still be able to share out that research and content, but like many organizations, we're



still trying to figure out what that looks like from beginning to end. We've got a road ahead of us, but we will have those lessons learned from our PRIME meeting.

Also, it's informing our spring meeting, which is occurring at the end of May this year. A statistic that I'm happy to share is that we had a handful of live symposia events for our PRIME meeting, and this time around for the upcoming spring meeting at the end of May, I think we're over 100 live symposia events. That's a really great opportunity for symposia organizers, session chairs, presenters, and attendees to engage in conversation while they're sitting at home or sitting in their office, accessing our content.

So we're going to take what we learned from PRIME 2020, we're employing it for our 239th ECS meeting with IMCS, and then also transitioning that to a hybrid for the fall with hopes, obviously, of being in person. We've learned a lot, and I think our commitment to our mission, our commitment to serving our community, and providing the research for the advancement of the science is enabling us to make a lot of these pivots and moves that we need to.

KENNEALLY: Finally, Shannon Reed, a community like the ECS community of scientists and researchers, they are about sharing with each other what they have learned in their own labs. I suppose that they must have been delighted to see that there remained an opportunity to do that even during this pandemic crisis. What's the feedback been that you've heard?

REED: I think the feedback is indicative of the attendance numbers that we've had. 7,000 people attending our PRIME 2020 meeting is the largest meeting that ECS has ever had. So the feedback has been great, in that people are still able to share their content. They're able to access it. The community is able to access it.

What's great about the digital component is that sometimes when we're at a meeting, there's a lot of classically trained electrochemists that are part of that in-person attendee. What this digital component with a no-cost registration, people are not having to travel, pay for a hotel – really allows the community to expand and grow beyond those classically trained electrochemists to people who may have an interest in impedance spectroscopy or corrosion and don't necessarily have that classical electrochemistry training. So we've seen tremendous growth. We're exciting for what's up and coming. And I think we've made the investments in the fall of 2020 and throughout winter and spring that will really set us up for successful meetings, both digital and hybrid, in the future.

KENNEALLY: Shannon Reed, director of community engagement at the Electrochemical Society, thanks so much for joining me today on Velocity of Content.



REED: Thanks, Chris. It was great to be here. Appreciate the opportunity.

KENNEALLY: Our producer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. You can follow the Velocity of Content podcast on Twitter and Facebook and subscribe to the CCC blog at copyright.com. I'm Christopher Kenneally. Goodbye for now.

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