

# best practices

INSIGHTS, IDEAS, CASE STUDIES



Because of registration enhancements this year, the average wait to pick up a badge at International CES was less than 5 minutes.

## THE REGISTRATION NIGHTMARE THAT NEVER WAS

How International CES and ITN created positive buzz about picking up a badge.

BY MARGO PIERCE

**The Bet:** An empty registration tent on the opening day of the largest U.S. electronics show

**The Location:** Las Vegas—the largest and busiest trade show destination in the country.

**The Stakes:** Over 155,000 potentially hacked-off tech geeks waiting in long lines to register.

**The Prize:** Attendee buzz (for the show) and bragging rights (for the vendor).

The **International Consumer Electronics Show (CES)** set out to revamp the attendee experience at its 2014 show (Jan. 8 – 11) and pulled it off, due in large part to ITN International.

“On Tuesday morning I made a stupid bet: The registration tent will be empty,” says Ivan Lazarev, president and CEO of ITN International.

The company was hired to make the registration process convenient and

efficient for everyone, from attendees to vendors. And people who registered online using their iPads while riding the monorail to the convention center had to get the same results as those who preregistered: badges ready when they checked in.

“We’re the world’s gathering place for anyone involved in the world in the business of technology and we pride ourselves on staying fresh, staying dynamic and leveraging the latest technology since we are such an important technology event,” says Tara Dunion, media relations manager for the Consumer Electronics Association, producer of CES. “This year we really (updated) the look and feel of the show. Registration was certainly an important part of that.

“In previous years we have mailed out the badges after people have registered. To be more green and more

technology focused, there was no pre-mailing of the badges. It was all done with onsite pickup.”

Tens of thousands of people flood into Las Vegas in the days before the event. The media comes early for a preview before the show opens, and no one wants to miss a single minute onsite. That was a huge advantage for Lazarev for winning his bet. Working in the event registration business since 1999, Lazarev has never mailed a badge. But he wanted to prove his system would work for a large-scale event like CES.

“On the opening day of the show, 80 percent of your attendees are already there. And if you catch them at the airport or at the hotel or the day before the event starts, you’re going to get 80 percent of your people badged,” he says. “We ended up having almost 75 percent of our people badged by the time the show opened.”

There were three key components essential to making that outcome possible:

- A pre-registration push, complete with an explanation of the new badging system
- Multiple badge pickup locations
- A near field communication (NFC) badge

CES started explaining the new badging process 10 months before the show began, emphasizing the need for pre-registration. The rest was up to ITN.

Multiple badge pickup locations were essential. In addition to having three different locations at the airport in three different baggage claim areas, the company deployed mobile pickup carts at one monorail station and numerous hotels. The carts were also available at multiple show venues and at outside kiosks on the convention center grounds to support the standard stationary badging location inside. A dedicated press badge pickup at Mandalay Bay took care of the early arrivals. Anyone could pick up their badges at virtually any time—almost anywhere.

People waiting for their luggage to arrive could visit a nearby CES badge pickup unit. The longest wait at the airport during peak travel hours was 12 minutes. In five minutes or less, a cart attendant would check ID and proof of business affiliation, such as business

Remote registration carts at International CES.



## Badging by the Numbers

Many of the numbers related to CES, such as the throughput of badge processing at the airport, are in the hands of an independent auditor. But some of the available figures are worth noting.

Approximate number of attendees:	<b>More than 155,000</b>	Number of laptops used at pickup locations:	<b>492</b>
The average wait for a badge pickup:	<b>5 minutes</b>	Average chip capacity used on a badge:	<b>800 characters</b>
Number of badge pickup locations:	<b>27</b>	Total chip capacity:	<b>4,000 characters</b>
Number of mobile pickup carts deployed:	<b>24</b>	Cost of new badging system versus paper expense:	<b>About even, according to Dunion</b>

cards, print the badge, program the NFC chips with all registration information and attach the badge to a badge coaster (an invention for ITN to support the NFC badge) with a lanyard. On their way back from dinner, people could stop at carts in their hotels. Staffers were able to direct VIPs or other attendees who needed to go to specific badge pickup locations to get specialized service.

There was no pile of printed tickets to keep track of for admission to sessions or other paid activities. All of the data for each attendee was digital and encrypted onto the NFC chip. The only paper used in the process was the badge itself and credit card receipts. This paperless component of NFC is something CES wanted to make the show green.

“Previously we had to print out a press bag, lunch coupons and a variety of paper printouts. With the NFC technology on the badges, all of that could be loaded onto the badge,” Dunion says. “Less printouts, less paper. The same for all attendees; if they registered for conference sessions or were eligible for certain VIP programs, all of that could be contained in the badge.”

All that was needed at each location

was an electrical outlet to power the cart and an Internet hookup. ITN used wireless routers at the airport because of its WiFi fees and unreliable connection. Some remote locations were more popular than others, but the carts’ mobility helped address some immediate needs during the 2014 deployment.

The combination of a new pickup system and a state-of-the-art badge created more buzz than the few glitches that occurred. Another source of amazement was the nearly empty registration tent the morning the show opened—meaning Lazarev won the bet.

“It was unreal compared to what the tent has been for the last five years,” Lazarev says. “That was a shock to a lot of people. We still had customers there, but the tent was so massive you (didn’t) ever see the tent busy.”

CES was equally pleased.

“Those components together—making the badges smarter, making the pickup options more widely available and more of them—was a great success for us at the 2014 CES,” Dunion says. ×

*Margo Pierce is a Cincinnati-based writer who specializes in technology and the events industry.*