

ASA Outreach in an Online World

L. Keeta Jones

As many *Acoustics Today* readers know, my role within the Acoustical Society of America (ASA) is to support and expand acoustics education and outreach initiatives. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I had to quickly pivot ASA outreach programs to better suit an online world. I know many readers have also transitioned to virtual platforms so I am sharing what I have learned. Although it has not been a straightforward process and I am still learning, I think my experiences can help others in their online outreach efforts.

In my experiences with in-person outreach, the connection between facilitators and participants is critical for meaningful experiences. This became even more obvious in the shift to virtual events where meaningful interactions became difficult. In September 2020, the ASA took part as a virtual exhibitor at SciFest All Access, a Virtual Expo featuring STEM activities for K-12 students (available at bit.ly/2Pu4lPj). At this online event, booth visitors could view our digital content and submit questions to our representatives. However, because everything was asynchronous, we weren't able to build relationships or rapport with the students. For example, there was no way to guide visitors through experiments or demonstrations and they simply had to do them on their time. Although being able to access digital content asynchronously is great, it actually limits our ability to nurture that spontaneous spark of interest that happens when a child is doing an experiment or exploring a new phenomenon.

I took what I learned from SciFest to heart when other events offered virtual booth opportunities. In October 2020 at the Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS; see bit.ly/2MMIMbX) national meeting and at the National Society of Black Physicists (see nsbp.org) national meeting in November 2020, we had live video-conferencing hours along with digital content that visitors could peruse at their own leisure. Even with this improvement, people still had to be encouraged to interact with us. At an in-person event, a person walks past the booth and I make eye contact and ask them if they would like to learn

about acoustics. But in an online world, I can't see that person and they can click around the booth in secret. To overcome this moving forward, I plan to develop a game, activity, or prize system to actively encourage people to not just come to our booth but to also talk to us. I have also learned that what works well in a virtual space may be something we bring to in-person physical meetings. For example, having a standing Zoom room is great so that attendees could meet more ASA members who could share their thoughts and experiences.

In addition to attending outside online meetings, the ASA also hosted outreach events. In July and August 2020, we featured three virtual presentations using Zoom in celebration of the International Year of Sound (IYS). With Zoom, we had more control over some options, capabilities, and interactions than we did using the platforms of other meetings. We were able to encourage viewers to use the chat feature to talk to one another and to submit questions. We were also able to schedule practice sessions to test systems and give instructions. Zoom also has a built-in recording feature that meant we were able to save each presentation for later dissemination. One major downside was that, at the time, Zoom did not have a live transcription option, and so speakers were encouraged to use PowerPoint automatic captions (see bit.ly/2MTnhq0) or Google Slides captions (see bit.ly/30fPLgK) to ensure that the talks were more accessible. Several attendees reached out to thank us for providing this feature and even asked for instructions on how to use them.

Ultimately, our hope was to feature scientists from a range of backgrounds to stimulate the understanding of the important role that sound plays in all aspects of our society. We even wrote press releases for each speaker to encourage media, scientists, audio enthusiasts, students, educators, and families to tune in. Based on our target audience, we tried to be clear with our speakers that the intended audience was the public and not acousticians, and we gave them examples of acoustics talks from the 2016 World Science Festival (see bit.ly/3kLAz4r) to further illustrate this.

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We invited AnnMarie Thomas (see bit.ly/30pOeEE), author of *Making Makers: Kids, Tools, and the Future of Innovation*; David Carreon Bradley (see bit.ly/3ekyCKX), a member of the Board of Directors for SACNAS; and Nicole Holliday (see bit.ly/3v73PqQ), who has written for NPR, Bloomberg News, and *The Washington Post*. This diverse set of speakers was invited as a way to welcome them into our Society and to uplift their voices within the field of acoustics. Andrew Morrison, the series co-organizer, kindly filled in when, David Carreon Bradley was unfortunately unable to present. Each event was well attended, and the recorded videos (available at bit.ly/38a58vq) have been viewed over 2,000 times. We intend to continue this speaker series, and because all of the previously invited speakers were from academic institutions, future invitees will likely be industry professionals.

The last online event I want to describe took part during the ASA Acoustics Virtually Everywhere online meeting in December 2020. The Education in Acoustics Committee developed Acoustics at Home, a virtual demonstration event to replicate the features of a typical hands-on session. The one-hour Zoom meeting consisted of short demonstrations constructed from everyday household items designed to help people experience and understand various acoustic properties. Our reasoning for taking this approach was that participants could and would be encouraged to build their own demonstrations and keep exploring at home. In the future, we could plan a follow-up event asking for viewer-submitted videos to really engage attendees.

Because ASA members have very busy meeting schedules, we asked our volunteers to film their demonstrations in advance. We advised them to explain the acoustic phenomenon of their chosen demonstration in a fun and engaging way and to avoid scientific jargon and the use of PowerPoint slides. We didn't want our volunteers to be in lecture mode or for our guests to feel as if they were taking a class. As with the IYS Speaker Series, we also provided our volunteers with a few video examples. In the end, we collected nine 5-minute videos in topics such as how to make music using glass bottles, how to build a model of the speaking apparatus using a duck call, and

ways to explore harmonics with an electric razor. After all the demonstrations were shown, attendees were encouraged to interact with the volunteer demonstrators. They asked for teaching tips and book recommendations and even shared some of their own demonstration ideas. Even though the event took place on a Wednesday afternoon in East Coast time, it was well attended, with just under 100 live viewers and, at the time of writing, the recorded videos (available at bit.ly/3e4ALKG) have been viewed 349 times. We received some feedback that the timing wasn't ideal for teachers and students still attending (virtual) school or those in other time zones. If we do this or a similar event again, I will schedule it for an evening or weekend slot in hopes of gaining more live participants.

In the future, you will see that there are a lot of virtual ASA events not strictly limited to the education outreach realm; however, many of them do serve a similar outreach capacity by making acoustics more accessible to the public, such as the ASA Webinar Series (available at bit.ly/3kTK8yc) and the East and South East Asia Regional Chapter Acoustics Masters Lecture Series (available at eseaasa.org) that provide ongoing learning and engagement opportunities for ASA members and nonmembers. I am planning on working with the Member Engagement Committee to create a new site to list all national, regional, and student chapter and technical committee events in one place so that everyone can see all of the exciting online ASA programming happening around the world. Until then, check out this listing of virtual events on the Explore Sound website (available at bit.ly/3v9hLAW). With what we have learned this past year, I hope that our outreach website, social media, and future online and in-person programming will continue to improve and motivate the public to explore sound.

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