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Give us the quick version: How do you describe your company?

Combining creative, human-centered design with technology, fabrication, and production expertise, Hargrove delivers focused event experiences and

solutions that have the power to connect, engage and transform target audiences.

What program from the last 12 months are you especially proud of and why?

We are very proud of all the work our teams do for our clients. One project that stands out this year is the DARPA Subterranean (SubT) Challenge Finals. This was a culmination of a worldwide, three-year competition devised to advance robotics and AI technology use in time-sensitive underground operations and response scenarios. Deployed inside the depths of the Louisville Mega Cavern, the Challenge Finals tested teams through courses fabricated to emulate three subdomain environments: tunnel systems, the urban underground, and cave networks. In addition to the design-builds for the physical systems competition, Hargrove provided the 3D modeling of the subdomains used to develop the concurrent virtual competition.

The mission of the SubT Challenge was to further the critical, lifesaving technologies that aid military and civilian first responders during disaster response situations. Its success depended upon technically complex and realistic course design. Using theatrical, theme park, and infrastructure build techniques, we created the three hyper-realistic subterranean environments – durable enough to support 500-pound robots yet portable enough to travel to event site for reassembly.

This project was over a year in the making – from initial planning, location search and site selection, research and development, creative, architectural design and fabrication, through to final production and execution. During the pandemic, as some exhibit houses sat idle, our creative, fabrication and production professionals were actively – and very successfully, honing their craft.

How are you leveraging technology and social media?

Technology is finding its way into all aspects of a goal we all share: to further personalize and customize experiences for individuals. Customer-centric experiences create a deeper connection to the brand, and this is a key goal for our clients. Social media channels allow these connections points to be made, pre, during and post event. Our clients are also using social to promote incentives to drive attendees to their environments in a very effective way.

The use of virtual environments, 3D simulations, interactive screens, digital content delivery formats and gaming are all finding their way into the tradeshow event environment. Increased sophistication of 3D printing allows for creating with a variety of materials, such as resin, plastic, stainless steel and titanium. Digital formats allow for freeing up space from previous physical elements, like registration desks and brochure racks, allowing our clients to dedicate space to branding or hyper-personalized experiences like AR.

Let's talk about short-term and long-term strategies teams can be working on now: Can you share some of the near-term items on your checklists (the immediate stop-gaps, quick cost-cutting solutions), and then some of the strategies you're exploring for later next year (new event and revenue models, out of the box ideas)?

None of us could have planned for a global pandemic. We used the time well and employed new approaches and formats to think differently about experience design. Finding the right balance between which events and programs would bring a client the expected ROI versus those that perhaps were on an “autopilot” list was key.

Planning a long-term holistic event portfolio is essential to finding this vital balance. Thinking about who is visiting the show floor in the future – IRL or virtually, is one of the most critical steps. Ensuring you understand the audience, their consumption habits and how they are changing are all key to the success of building a sustainable, long-term portfolio that allows you to modify as needed as the world continues to offer unpredictable swerves. These are the strategies we are working on with our clients at Hargrove and ones we'd love to help new clients think through.