

Virtual AGMs: how we scale and flex to help our clients, large and small

COVID-19 is the most-life changing event to happen during our generation.

It's a story we will tell those who aren't yet born: how everyone had to stay safe and stay home, institutions closed their doors for the first time in decades – even centuries, and it seemed the world had stopped turning.

But, of course, it hadn't. Businesses deemed essential had to support their customers because their customers still needed them. Industries already had one foot submerged in the pool of digital before COVID, but we all had to jump straight in.

Throughout 2020, listed companies were still committed to Companies Act regulatory requirements to meet end-of-year reporting as well as their shareholders' rights involved in general meetings. Social distancing laws introduced by the government prohibited their shareholders' physical presence.

Companies needed to hold meetings behind closed doors and ask shareholders to submit any questions via e-mail before the event. They could also submit their voting by proxy / electronic means ahead of the event or find a way to host their AGMs remotely.

And that's where we came in.

Step 1: The digital platform

When our clients came to us for help, we hadn't supported a fully-virtual AGM before. Before, there was little demand in the market with most companies hosting physical events with shareholders there in-person or voting via proxy in advance.

We needed to create an online platform quickly. The first national UK lockdown began at the end of March 2020, so AGM season was soon upon us.

Working alongside our UK software partner, we created a platform that adapts to our clients new and preferred ways of hosting their AGM – streaming via remote audio webcast where only the chairman and one director are on-location so that quorum requirements are fulfilled.

This authentication process ensured only genuine shareholders could access the meeting, ensuring authenticity around voting and protecting it from the public or remote interference.

Shareholders had the option to access the live stream via their smartphone or personal computer

Shareholders could participate using unique user login details given to them ahead of the event

We understand the need for our clients to engage with their shareholders despite the impact of COVID-19.

There are legal obligations placed on the directors of companies to hold the events within strict timeframes. Our hybrid solution enables shareholders to:



Ask
questions



Vote on
resolutions
Through the platform



Listen to the
meeting
If the client requires

The software is programmed to release results almost instantly, combined with the results already taken from proxies, so that shareholders aren't burdened by delays during the new and perhaps unfamiliar process.

Step 2: Giving the client what they need

We are doing what it takes to help our clients, large and small. Every client is different. They all need different things and we make sure we are flexible and can adapt.

For example, one of our clients, SAGA has a complex register with over **165,000 shareholders**. They have a range of different mailing preferences, so we worked all hours of the day across different departments to ensure they each received their unique user logins through communications of their choice.

Other issues can arise, like when a new shareholder onboards after these communications have been sent. To solve this, we include a helpline number for all new shareholders wishing to attend so they can speak to our fully-trained and dedicated operators.

Our virtual AGM structure also solves many location issues. The majority of directors of Network International are based in Dubai. By using our platform, the company was able to host their AGM remotely rather than postponing and paying high prices for travel. Other clients have utilised our in-house investor relations team, Orient Capital, and their webcasting resources.



In one case, asking for the webcasting platform to be scaled from being able to handle 2,000 viewers to **60,000** in less than a week, with colleagues on standby around the world and in different time zones for support.

D.F. King, our global expert in stakeholder engagement and proxy solicitation has continued to provide their market leading service in support of clients over this period.

Working with issuers to engage with investors, securing shareholder support and ensuring that high voting levels are maintained during this unusual time, as well as running more than 100 CG roadshow campaigns and a number of activist defences.

Step 3: What's next?



Since the beginning of lockdown, we've had over 50 requests for virtual AGMs and counting.

Our platform is constantly evolving to help our clients succeed. Through flexibility and scale, it has adapted for each of their requirements.

But we will continue to improve so that we are even more flexible and we want to develop our software at a lower cost to save money for our clients.

We predict more companies will host virtual or more likely hybrid AGMs going forward, giving their shareholders more options to either attend in person or dial in remotely.

Almost everyone now has access to modern technology, their travel time and costs will reduce and so the net of those who can attend is wider.

Virtual or hybrid AGMs also help companies support their CSR goals, promoting a more sustainable and environmentally-friendly approach to shareholder meetings.

Before COVID-19, we knew the future was digital. But the future is now, and we're here for you.

In 2020...

we supported

26

Separate hybrid meeting events in the UK

Orient Capital have supported

55

remote events

We've delivered over

600

virtual / hybrid AGM / GMs globally

Contact us

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