**hEDGE Part 5 Transcript**

Farah Mohd Fadzil

How has the global pandemic shifted how the hEDGE conference is coordinated and managed?

Jennie L.

Yeah, so I touched on this earlier, but the pandemic basically forced our conference to, from a one day in person event to now a two part virtual event. we realized that we can’t replicate fully what a one day in person would be and shift that to online, I think that would work ineffectively. We decided that to make things easier for both the students and sponsors attending, that we would cut the conference into two days. Something else that we decided was to shift our dates up. So thanks to the virtual setting, we were able to move the conference up because of that we were able to have the conference happen at a time before postings were released. That way, students kind of get a first hand look at what jobs are going to be posted, which firms are hiring and for what opportunities. And then, when it goes liv on WaterlooWorks, they already have all of this information beforehand that can help them land these roles. So I would say those are the two major changes that Adam and I decided on for this year.

Adam C.

So, we were able to focus on, well what is the best experience that you can give in an online environment? its not going to be the same as what has happened previously in person, but we can still focus all our time to maximize the experience that comes out of the hedge conference. Splitting the conference up over the two days to give people a break and to just make sure people stay engaged and have the opportunity to get the most out of the conference. I think that also, we did have a bit of experience previously, being that the hedge conference is a year long commitment that it is, that sometimes we have students who are on campus at Waterloo, sometimes we have students who are on coop in Toronto, Waterloo, across the world. So we have coordinated it in the past with these online methods of communication. Also, as a team, like to meet up occasionally just to have fun. We haven’t been able to do that, we haven’t been able to let loose. We didn’t get to have a post-conference celebration as we typically would have. but were definitely waiting for everything to return to a setting where we could safely do that and definitely looking forward to meeting up as a team, finally.

Farah Mohd Fadzil

Jennie also touched a bit about this with making it interactive and making use of Hopin, but thinking about student engagement and allowing it to be interactive for a virtual conference, what strategies, or what other strategies did you need to implement to adapt for this year’s conference?

Jennie L.

So, I think that changing the conference structure helped a lot with that because students can effectively hop in to – pun intended – hop in to different rooms. If I could describe or visualize that way that the conference was held, it was each sponsor workshop had their own room and designated students would go to that room to attend that workshop. when it was time for networking, each networking representative would also have their own room and students could rotate through this as they wished. In a way, it kind of functioned very similar to in person networking because we also limited the room sizes to about five people, so it would be including the rep and four other students. So similarly, in an in person setting, that’s also how networking typically works, you wait until one person is done speaking and then once the representative is open, you would join that circle and also join that conversation and that’s one of the strategies that we used to shift to a virtual setting and still make it engaging to students. Another thing we did that I thought was pretty fun, we actually held contest at the end of each day where we held a Kahoot quiz and that Kahoot quiz would be questioning students on things that the keynote speakers talked about during their presentation, things that perhaps happened in the women’s panel, for example, so elements of the conference that we wanted students to remember about the day.

Adam C.

Yeah, I would definitely say, the platform is one of the major parts that allowed us to increase engagement where we did our best to mimic what is it actually like to stand in a room full of networking reps and look around and see who do I want to talk to, who can I talk to and how many other people are talking to this person? We had all of the different networking virtual rooms, little tiles on the screen that you can see how many students are looking a this room, how many people are talking to this person. and you can go to see which rooms you want to see, to see which people you want to see. that was I think, a really great experience for the students to have at the end of each day of the conference.

Garvin Blair

This is an excellent example of turning what could’ve been a real negative into a positive and all the credit to Jennie and Adam and the team for putting an online conference. using online elements to make it a positive experience, asking the questions ahead of time and the networking capabilities that we had with the Hopin technology. it would’ve been easy to just do it on Zoom, but it wouldn’t have been as good. So, turning a negative into a positive is I think a credit to the team and again, just to reiterate, to students perhaps watching this, we all agree, COVID hasn’t been fun, there hasn’t been a lot of fun with this. We don’t like doing everything online but you’ve got to give it a try and you’ve got to be active and if you come to a conference like hEDGE, if its online or in person, you’ve got to be an active participant, don’t dwell on the negatives. be active and be positive, that will be to your long-term benefit.