

The logo for 6CONNEX, featuring a stylized '6' inside a square followed by the word 'CONNEX' in a bold, sans-serif font. The background of the entire page is a blue and yellow gradient with silhouettes of two people in a meeting and a network diagram of glowing nodes and lines.

**6CONNEX**

eBook

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**VIRTUAL SALES CONFERENCE:**

# Meet, Educate and Collaborate in an Instant

By Michael Nelson, CEO 6Connex

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The launch of a product and the following sales kickoff events can mean a lot of pressure and a lot of collected hopes hinging on the successful outcome. That doesn't mean it has to be a high-stress, high-chaos event where everyone has to be herded into one room or to one event center.

With workforces increasingly moving away from centralized offices and into the home or on the road, it's becoming less and less workable to put together the kind of traditional SKOs that a certain highly visible and popular, sleek technological manufacturer has brought into the collective awareness. Instead, SKOs are moving into the digital realm, and experienced sales managers are finding the experience enhances the kickoff, with a lot less overhead and money spent to get it done. Having run my fair share of Sales Kickoffs over the years, I know what the challenges are and how the platform is changing. The short answer: it's all going virtual. The reasons are simple and many, and it may change the heart of your sales strategy to move your SKOs to an entirely online presentation. Read on to get an idea of how the industry is changing.

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## MAXIMIZE YOUR AVAILABLE TIME

It's been fairly well established that our modern, computer-trained brains' attention span maxes out quickly – after about an hour. And let's face it: no matter how good the free coffee or lunch is, there is no way to make sitting in a room listening to speakers for hours and hours engaging. If it were merely a dog-and-pony show, that might still be alright. But your sales department depends on retaining all the new information in order to bring up the bottom line, and arming them with the best training should be the top priority.

The traditional SKO is about learning, networking, and socializing. However, networking and socializing don't mix well with learning. If my college days offer any proof—I always did better when I worked first and played later. The problem is, while most will agree with what I just said, they don't want to give up the institution because in reality they love the networking and socializing, and in exchange they tolerate that they have to sit through 2-3 days of lectures.

It's always important to network, but in the age of instant communication and collaboration tools, paring your SKO down to the virtual environment keeps the focus on the information at hand.



SonicWall took their latest SKO to the virtual world, and we were able to facilitate live sessions, as well as Q&A "hot topic" sessions, along with a robust library of informational resources. Their sales force was able to log into the virtual SKO from their home offices and get right to analyzing the latest security trends and threats, while gaining the latest security solution updates from the product management team. **"We were able to use the momentum we created when we became an independent company, and keep it going with these 'hot topic' and live executive sessions during our virtual SKO - We could get our message out quickly, easily, and create the same excitement we would as if we hosted an event, without the stress and high dependency on our OPEX budget,"** said Steve Pataky, SonicWall Vice President Worldwide Sales.





Instead of a jam-packed 2 days where your sales team has to scribble down as many notes as they can during the sessions, then stay up all night networking with their colleagues, use the virtual environment to help your sales staff focused and engaged in the environment where they work most efficiently. Just like you don't need to wait six months to introduce yourself to a new business connection anymore, you shouldn't have to wait six months to make this information available to your salespeople, and you shouldn't have to burden them with flights and travel to get it.

When your SKO is virtual, you can use it as a resource library that's available 24/7/365, anywhere in the world. Your sales team gets better exposure to the information, and in turn are able to hit every value prop every time they meet with clients.

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# MAXIMIZE YOUR MONEY

Too many sales departments miss out on key information and presentations because it's simply not worth the expense of putting a 2- or 3-day event. With location rentals, food, travel, and hotel costs, it's not a mystery why a company might skip it altogether. With the potential of live video, there's no longer a need to cancel an SKO that has ballooned beyond its budget.

Instead, you can expand your reach, and your employees have no excuse not to sell with the best information available.

Not to mention that any salesperson out of the field is not producing. The virtual environment maximizes those opportunities by simply not requiring the same kind of travel. SonicWall still does in-person sales meetings, but the virtual environment allows them to make the most of those in-person meetings to focus on education. They wanted a sales kickoff that could maintain the expectation of a dazzling environment, but one that was available in every time zone, anytime it's needed.



# EDUCATION AFTER A SALES KICKOFF

As I've said before, you really have a limited window to capture any audience's attention, and your sales department is the fuel that fires the pistons of the rest of the company. The virtual environment frees up your workforce to get to the drier information when they can absorb it, and you can spend your presentation getting them fired up about the future. In the short term, a good SKO is an opportunity to really inspire and electrify your sales force, to invest them in the forward direction of your brand and turn them into advocates instead of just sales people.

Once they are inspired and invested, they'll be much more enthusiastic about digging into the details, and naturally become more adept at selling the product. With the ongoing availability of sales resources, you can rest assured that they'll have correct, updated information available all the time.

This is especially important when onboarding new hires. Instead of having to compile tons of onboarding materials, the virtual environment allows your new hires to jump right into the latest version of a product even if they're hired after the launch. While it wasn't the goal for SonicWall, the ability to reference these presentations resulted in faster onboarding and better information retention for new hires.



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## MAINTAIN A CONVERSATION

A final benefit to the virtual SKO is the capability to break off into smaller discussion "breakouts" and discuss the information learned. It also keeps the social element of the SKO alive while maintaining a professional environment of idea exchange.

The most successful launches will find sales managers taking full advantage of this feature, pulling together small groups of people to focus on a single message or metric on a regular basis. SonicWall wanted to be able to keep their own internal conversation going, tailoring it the changing goals of the company. A virtual SKO allowed them to create an interactive and visually-rich environment on a shorter turnaround, creating a higher level of engagement among the sales staff.

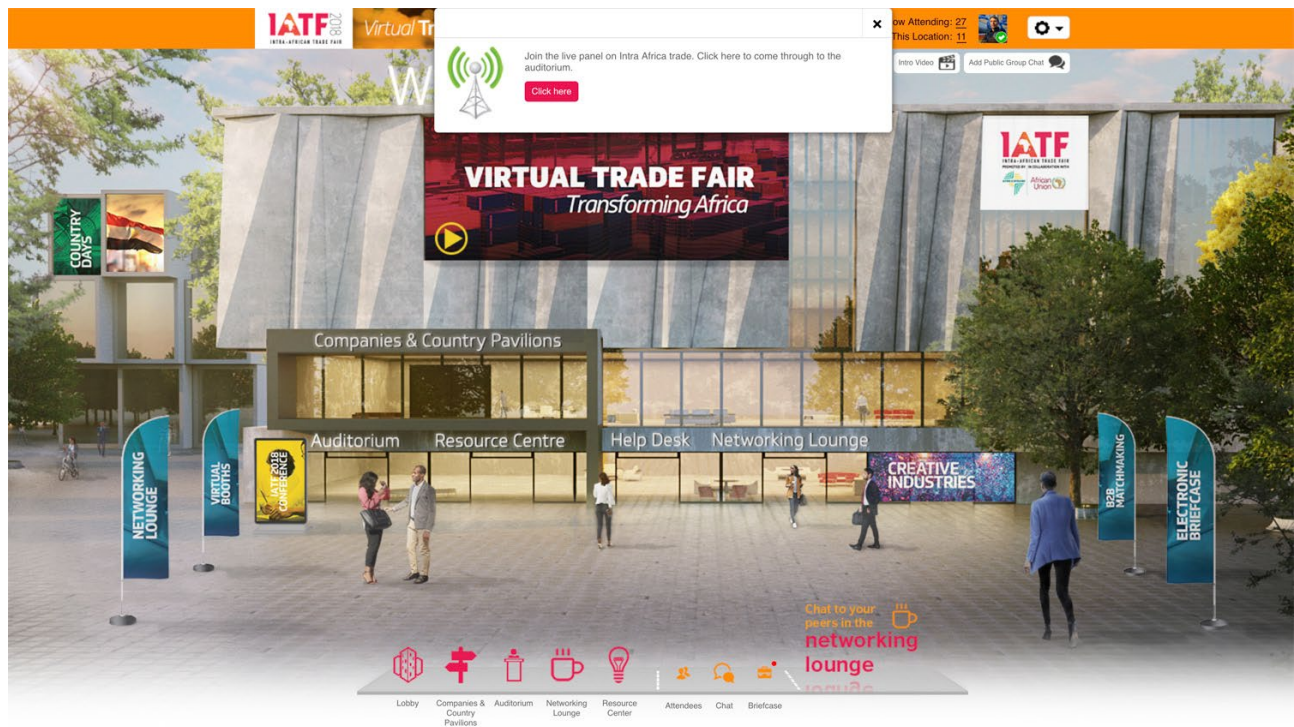
As a former VP of sales, I like the idea of virtual SKOs from a cost saving and learning perspective, but I do enjoy the networking and social part that everyone looks forward too during the traditional SKO event. I have had clients that will allocate a budget for regional networking events, or they will host a couple days of virtual learning and then at the end host a series of regional happy hours. SKO events focused on learning can be a cost-effective and productive series of events, and with a little creativity, the networking and socializing can be a reward at the end or invest in it as its own standalone event series, where the focus is on networking and socializing.





# AN ALL-INCLUSIVE SOLUTION

Whether you're replacing in-person meetings or adding to your educational lineup, the ability to stream live presentations, archive and reference them anytime is an invaluable tool for any sales manager. Instead of a product launch balancing upon the hasty notes of a sleep-deprived salesperson, take back the quality control over the information and make it available to your team whenever they need it. There's no room for error when it comes to giving the beating heart of your business the best new product information that you can, and virtual SKOs will become essential to future launches.



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