



Virtual Exhibition 2023: Company-wide Technical Presentation

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1 Introduction

In December 2023, KYB held its internal company-wide technical presentation, “Virtual Exhibition 2023.”

The exhibition was held online, which was a new style converted from the traditional one held in a physical location due to the outbreak of COVID-19. The virtual exhibition was very impressive and attracted 107 entries.

This report describes the background and impact of the virtual exhibition.

2 From Physical to Virtual Exhibition

2.1 Company-wide Technical Presentation

KYB holds a company-wide technical presentation every year in order to deploy technologies horizontally, share information, and increase motivation for development. Preliminary presentations in the three fields of production engineering, hydraulic electronics, and automobile (block presentations) are held as a competition. The top two topics in each presentation are selected for the company-wide technical presentation.

2.2 Exhibition

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the exhibition was held on the same day as the block presentations. After applying for the presentations, engineers exhibited presentation boards showing their research and development (R&D) results and actual R&D products to share information with each other and promote their technologies to visitors. Each block attracted applications to exhibit nearly 100 topics each year.

The biggest advantage of the exhibition was that visitors could hear the explanation of R&D directly from the engineers at the exhibition booth. Visitors who usually did not have the opportunity to see R&D products could also look at actual exhibits to identify the features of

products that they could not clearly imagine just by listening to the presentation. On the other hand, the engineers at the booth could exchange opinions and get reactions from the company's directors and managers of other departments/sections who were visiting the exhibition to increase their own motivation.

The exhibition was so popular every year that the aisles were crowded with people, making it difficult for them to move around (Photo 1). However, the outbreak of COVID-19 in the winter of 2020 limited the holding of internal events. The company-wide technical presentation accordingly had to be held on a smaller scale, resulting in the cancelation of the on-site exhibition to avoid the three Cs (closed spaces, crowded places, and close contact settings)

2.3 Reviving the Exhibition

During the three years from FY2020 to FY2022, when the exhibition was canceled, there were calls to revive a place to share and display the results of daily R&D. When the Japanese government reclassified COVID-19 as Class 5 under the Infectious Diseases Control Law, we considered resuming the exhibition. However, we finally gave up because holding the exhibition at physical locations as before still carried the risk of the three Cs, as the number of infected people happened to be increasing again. Another reason was that the traditional exhibition was held for only one day at each development site. Visitors and participants had to travel to different locations to see the exhibition, and in some cases they might not be able to visit all the locations due to work or other reasons. We then considered holding a web-based exhibition so that anyone in the company could view the exhibition as long as they had the necessary environment. Finally, in FY2023, we decided to hold the company-wide technical presentation as Virtual Exhibition 2023.



Photo 1 Exhibition room

3 Developing a Virtual Exhibition Site

There were only four months of preparation from the decision to create a virtual exhibition to the opening. We considered a method that would be accessible to all employees and allow the exhibition to be developed in a short period of time.

3.1 Tools Used

We used Microsoft365[®] SharePoint[®], which is used throughout the company, to develop a virtual exhibition site. Although there was a plan to hire an external website development company to develop the site, we decided to use SharePoint[®] as it was advantageous when comparing cost, creation time, and quality.

SharePoint[®] is a web-based information sharing tool. Users can share files and schedules, communicate with each other, and easily develop websites. It is possible to develop a generic site with general-purpose features, although one drawback is that it is limited in what can be freely configured. Still, users can develop websites at low cost in a short period of time without knowledge of the web source code^{Note 1)}.

Note 1) A programming language used to build a website. It includes HTML and CSS.

3.2 Other Virtual Exhibition Sites

To determine the trend in virtual exhibitions, I visited virtual exhibition sites for various events. During the COVID-19 outbreak, many organizations presented virtual exhibitions. These included product explanation through movies, public images of products taken from all possible directions, and product explanation by an avatar exhibitor^{Note 2)}. Among them was an impressive exhibition where visitors could be an avatar and move around in 3D space to see the exhibits as if they were actually in the room.

In fact, I had thought that an exhibition was

"something I should go to see". However, experiencing virtual exhibitions gave me a positive impression as I enjoyed the advantages of saving the time and trouble of traveling to the site and allowing me to view many exhibits in a short time. I also thought it was good to learn the outline of a product in a virtual space and then make an individual appointment for an interesting product before traveling to the site to see it.

Note 2) A character that represents the user in digital space.

3.3 Considering Configuration of the Virtual Exhibition Site

Despite the limited functions available in SharePoint[®], we considered a configuration of the virtual exhibition site that could easily express the characteristics of the exhibition theme while maintaining the traditional exhibition impression using presentation boards (Fig. 1). We designed the virtual exhibition site to be able to add R&D product introduction movies, related images (without numerical limitations), and URL links (if the relevant departments have a public website), in addition to the conventional content. It was also

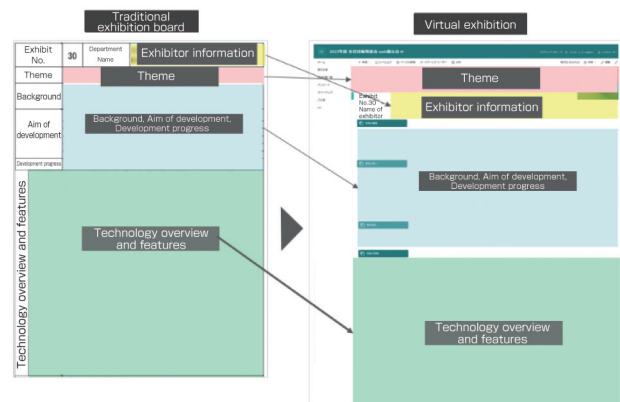


Fig. 1 Comparison of traditional exhibition board and virtual exhibition



Fig. 2 What to add

decided to use the SharePoint® "Comment" and "Like" functions to facilitate communication with visitors (Fig. 2).

3.4 Designing the Virtual Exhibition Site

Through trial and error, we used SharePoint® Space Note 3) to create a 3D environment for the main page of the virtual exhibition site so that the site represented virtual space as much as possible (Figs. 3 and 4). The main page was designed to be categorized under each department in order to move to relevant exhibit pages for different topics (Fig. 4).

For the 107 topics applied, the engineers promoted their R&D full of movies and images that represented their personality. The exhibition was so wonderful that I became obsessed with it, even though the editorial deadline was approaching.

Note 3) One of the SharePoint® features. It allows 3D object web parts, 360° images, 2D images, and text to be placed in the same space.



Fig. 3 Virtual exhibition site main page [1]



Fig. 4 Virtual exhibition site main page [2]

4 Opening the Virtual Exhibition Site

The virtual exhibition site was complete when the exhibition pages had been created, and the Secretariat had finished editing and final checking. We made the exhibition known to employees by creating a promotional brochure about our internal exhibition activity (Fig. 5). On December 13, 2023, the company-wide technical presentation Virtual Exhibition 2023 was opened to the public.

There was no specific time frame set for

viewing the website (internal employees can still view it). The number of "Likes" for the exhibition and chat communications were made public for about two weeks until December 28.

The total number of viewers was 591 and the cumulative number of hits during the exhibition period was 5,557.



Fig. 5 Virtual exhibition promotional brochure

5 Questionnaire

We conducted a questionnaire to determine what could be improved for the next exhibition. Out of 111 exhibitors, 87 answered the questionnaire. Some of the results of the questionnaire are presented below.

In order to determine their willingness to participate in the exhibition, the questionnaire asked the exhibitors why they applied for the virtual exhibition (Fig. 6). While many of them applied under the guidance of their supervisors, some others did so to actively promote their own R&D.

Why did you apply for the virtual exhibition?
(Multiple answers are allowed).

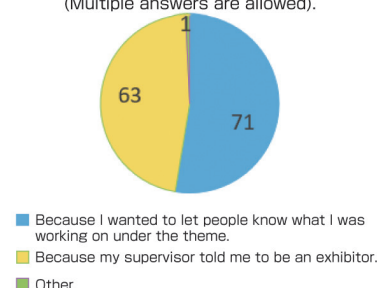


Fig. 6 Questionnaire results (Why I became an exhibitor)

In order to determine the likelihood of exhibiting again in the next year (tentative), the questionnaire asked respondents if they would like to exhibit again in the next year. They were also

asked why (Fig. 7). Almost half of the respondents said that they would like to exhibit again next year. The reasons are listed below:

- It was an interesting experience.
- I could always take time to visit the virtual exhibit to see what other departments were working on.
- The exhibition site helps promote our technology.
- I would like the virtual exhibition to be held again next year with almost the same degree of freedom as this year, without any restrictions or limitations.

Do you want to be an exhibitor again in a possible virtual exhibition in the next fiscal year?

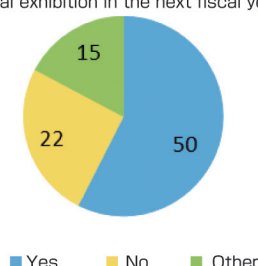


Fig. 7 Questionnaire results (If I want to be an exhibitor next year)

The following are some of the reasons they did not want to exhibit and other items that could be improved:

- It takes many man-hours to prepare an exhibit.
- I think the exhibition should be promoted more actively.
- I think the exhibition should have an exhibit award.
- I would like to communicate more with the viewers.

During this exhibition, only a few people used the "Like" function. I thought it was necessary to develop a system that would make viewers want to press the "Like" button, but the promotion was actually insufficient. In addition, some exhibitors could not get much feedback from viewers even though they put a lot of effort into creating the exhibit, which resulted in lower motivation. The biggest challenge

for the next exhibition may be the two-way communication between exhibitors and viewers.

While we were able to gather many opinions for improvement, we also heard some positive opinions: "The virtual exhibition is something I can visit anytime I want. I was able to spend more time looking at the exhibits than I would have at a physical location"; "I could imagine how we could use the technology to work in our department"; "The exhibition could be used for us to disseminate information". I was happy to hear such positive comments and would like to work hard with these opinions as an incentive.

6 About the Next Virtual Exhibition

Based on the results of the questionnaire on the FY2023 exhibition, we are planning to hold an exhibition in FY2024 with higher motivation of exhibitors. We are trying to design the next exhibition in such a way that questionnaire responses such as "I got an idea for a new product from the exhibition" and "Communication among engineers has gained momentum" will be generated.

7 In Closing

We were able to open a web-based exhibition, which was the first trial in KYB, with the cooperation and support of many people including the exhibitors, although we were quite busy throughout the whole process from preparation to opening.

When I checked the number of hits after the exhibition period, I found that about 130 viewers visited the site in one month. I am very pleased to see that the site is being used as a place to share information. I would like to continue planning activities where researchers and developers can discover something new and get information useful for their own development.

Author



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Joined the company in 2013.
Engineering Planning Dept.,
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