

# DIGITAL DIAGNOSTICS

Industry association turns to virtual tech for annual event

By David Cortez



PHOTO: ARNAUD SARNIGUET/BOOMACHINE

The American Medical Device and Diagnostics Manufacturers' Association (AMDD), which is supported by many American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) member companies, held its Extraordinary General Meeting on September 14, but this year the event was entirely virtual. It seemed like an obvious decision as there are few industries more interested in acting responsibly during a pandemic than healthcare.

"We normally use our events as an opportunity to have special guests and provide a networking space for our members," said Makoto Kawai, the director of government affairs at Zimmer Biomet G.K. who also serves as head of the AMDD's Public Affairs Committee as well as vice-chair of the ACCJ Medical Devices and Diagnostics Subcommittee. "But this year, because we are part of the healthcare industry, it was important for us not to take any risk of spreading the virus and to set a good example."



**DR. YASUHIRO SUZUKI**  
Former chief medical and global health officer  
Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare



**KAZUYA OGAWA**  
Chairperson, AMDD  
President  
Biomet G.K.

Frustrated by some of the limitations of the usual online platforms, the AMDD opted for the services of Bespoke Live. The recently launched virtual event-planning service—jointly developed by ACCJ member Parthenon Japan Company Ltd., a strategic communications agency, and integrated creative agency Boomachine Inc.—represents a deeper shift in the future of business gatherings amid the current wave of advancements in communications technology.

## VIRTUAL SOLUTION

The founders of the Bespoke Live brand, Parker J. Allen and Marc-Antoine Astier, recall having conversations with clients and colleagues about the flaws in products such as Zoom which led them to create a service that could tackle the kind of interactivity and quality the AMDD needed for its event.

"With the pandemic, there has been almost zero networking," said Kawai. "There is, of course, a move to hosting many discussions online, but the networking opportunities are not really a part of such events. The technology to completely recreate the feel and benefits of a traditional conference was something I was looking for."

Astier, who has a background in producing live events and popular YouTube series, manages the video and tech at Bespoke Live. For the AMDD event, he and his team filmed



**MAKOTO KAWAI**  
Director of government affairs  
Zimmer Biomet G.K.  
Vice-chair, ACCJ Medical Devices  
and Diagnostics Subcommittee

the speeches and interviews using top-grade equipment at a livestream-capable recording studio in Tokyo's Akihabara district. The content was to be used for the event's main video feed. They combined this with another new platform, Remo, for the interactive aspects of the event. Remo facilitates "all the in-between conversations" by using a digital conference room that allows participants to have side chats and move among virtual tables. It also provides live polling and question-and-answer features.

As many government officials were set to attend the AMDD event, Kawai said he was eager to facilitate a legitimate virtual networking opportunity for important discussions on healthcare.

"When I shared with the government health officers what was possible, they were very interested in the opportunity," he explained. "They are hungry to get the chance to casually exchange views with the medical industry."

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## FUTURE MEDICINE

The AMDD's general meeting was attended by 200 business leaders and participating officials in the healthcare and medical devices industries. They participated in a discussion with Dr. Yasuhiro Suzuki, former chief medical and global health officer for the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, which was streamed to 72 virtual tables of four virtually "seated" attendees.

Suzuki delivered the keynote speech, entitled Novel Coronavirus and Future Medicine, in front of a well-lit white backdrop and surrounded by three cinematic cameras with switchers and top-level audio equipment, before being interviewed



PHOTO: C. BRANAN JONES

Wearables can help monitor physical condition.

by AMDD Chairperson and Zimmer Biomet G.K. President Kazuya Ogawa in the same studio setting.

Beyond sharing his thoughts on the initial spread of the virus, and data about why Japan's aging population has lower mortality rates compared with those of other nations, Suzuki had a lot to say about the lessons learned from the outbreak and what he believes is needed for the future. "There are some things that we know will be avoidable next

time something like this happens, like making sure that our access to protective gear is more diversified and better stockpiled, rather than relying heavily on importing from other countries," he said. "But we should also be proactively making investments in telemedicine and swifter information sharing technology, as these are the things that will really make a difference in our response capability," he added, referring to online doctor-patient screenings and a more modern way for national and local medical facilities to communicate.

"That means no more fax machines," said Suzuki, commenting on the criticism of sluggish data sharing that Japan



PHOTO: ARNAUD SARNIGUET/BOOMACHINE

Dr. Suzuki (left) and Ogawa participating in the virtual networking session.

is known for—a sentiment shared by Taro Kono, the minister in charge of administrative reform in Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's Cabinet, who expanded his crusade against *hanko* (personal seals) to the fax machine on September 25.

Ogawa was quick to agree. “This is where we see the medical device industry being a strong partner with the government's health agenda,” he said. “The future of medical data is related to digital platforms, not only to limit unnecessary physical interaction, but for exponentially increasing the speed of information sharing.”

When asked by a participant from Edwards Lifesciences Ltd. if we will ever be able to go back to the pre-Covid normal, Suzuki was optimistic that we will eventually attenuate the virus through vaccines and other measures, but said that “wearing masks and practicing higher sanitation will likely continue.”

#### TECH AND THE NEW NORMAL

Expanding on post-pandemic life, Suzuki and Ogawa both advocated for a future that is less focused on short interactions with a doctor, which tend only to reveal small slices of a patient's overall health, and more on sustained monitoring of a person's physiological data for long stretches of time through the use of wearable devices.

“In future healthcare, the kind of immediacy that such devices would provide is very necessary. We imagine a future where patients or citizens will be told when they need to go to a professional, or when a professional should come to them,” said Ogawa.

That the two speakers called for further use of technology while speaking virtually to the AMDD membership was significant, both for the healthcare implications and adoption of communications technology. During the proceedings, Bespoke provided live simultaneous interpretation in English and Japanese, while the Remo digital networking platform allowed guest speakers to drop by the virtual tables for an authentic networking experience—something that has been sorely missed in these online professional settings.

“It was amazing to have the real feeling of a conference and the dialogue we wanted in order to have a good discussion,” said Suzuki. “It was different at first, and there were some minor technical difficulties, but I was very pleased with the event.”



**PARKER J. ALLEN**  
Co-founder  
Bespoke Live



**MARC-ANTOINE ASTIER**  
Co-founder  
Bespoke Live



Bespoke Live used the Remo platform to manage virtual tables.

#### EVOLVING TOOLS

Allen and Astier agreed that, as with any newly emerging technology and services, there is room for improvement in integrating all the platforms and devices needed to pull off such an event. It was occasionally necessary to scramble and fix a few behind-the-scenes issues.

“These things are to be expected with anything live,” said Astier. “The unique combination of technology is so new that the key is to learn each time you do an event to keep making the service better.”

If a slight unfamiliarity of such an experience can be felt by Astier, then seeing several of the participants not know exactly what to do at certain moments made it all the more clear that users and attendees were also exploring new territory, and that growing with the technology is part of everyone's new normal.

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Still, the AMDD general meeting can be seen as a milestone for the industry and its relationship with technology. The achievement speaks to the importance of the kind of digital advocacy that government and industry leaders are pushing as a result of the pandemic.

Kawai speaks highly of the fact that the AMDD was able to use new technology for its event, despite the current strained economic landscape and restrictions on social interaction. “We wanted our organization to be seen showing and using new ways to communicate and collaborate,” he said. “We believe that healthcare is very close to IT these days, and we wanted to keep this relationship going, especially in the current situation.”

The courage to use new technology is really the takeaway from the AMDD event, proving that the future of healthcare is likely a digital one. ■