

CONVERGENCE.2011

April 10-13, 2011 | Atlanta, GA

<http://www.microsoft.com/dynamics/convergence/>

EVENT OVERVIEW

As the premier event for the Microsoft Dynamics® customer and partner business community, **Convergence** is where opportunity and innovation meet to deliver real business value. Loaded with a wealth of informative keynote & breakout sessions, an expansive expo floor, and plentiful networking opportunities, Convergence is the annual event where connections are generated, best practices are shared, and business relationships are built and renewed.

Convergence 2011 hosted nearly 9,100 attendees, drawing participants from all around the globe. Now in its 16th year, it remains one of the most highly-rated Microsoft events, with 98% of attendees consistently noting in evaluation feedback that they would participate again. Convergence 2009, which took place in March of that year, was the first North American event certified under BS8901:2007.



Not only can we tell the story of all of the individual efforts we've employed in energy efficiency, air and water quality efforts, environmental purchasing, waste reduction and recycling, and volunteer efforts with the local community and donations, but the numbers confirm that these efforts are meeting our goals.

Highlights of Convergence 2011's success include:

Goal 1: Reduce Waste and Ensure Successful Recycling, Composting and Donation Collection

Result: Increased focus on reducing waste led to a significant reduction in the use of disposable products (including 25,000 paper plates), and reduced the overall amount of waste by 4 tons compared to the prior year. Continued focus on recycling and composting resulted in 30 tons (an estimated 3 semi-trucks full) of waste recycled, composted or donated, representing 60% of the waste produced during the event.

Goal 2: Make Environmentally Responsible Purchases



Result: Approximately 94% of collateral, giveaways and food service ware were environmentally preferable. Convergence even "closed the loop" and showcased our commitment to sustainability by making the attendee bag almost entirely from the signage from Convergence 2010 and other reclaimed outdoor signs. The bags alone kept 2,500 pounds of waste out of the landfill, and 47,000 square feet of virgin material from being used.

Goal 3: Increase Opportunities for Participation in Community Outreach Activities

Result: Hundreds of attendees participated in two organized volunteer activities which provided artwork to a hospital and installed play structures in low income housing areas. \$16,000 was donated from the evaluation donation program, 1,000 meals were provided to people in need, and left over items were donated to local organizations.



CHOREOGRAPHING SUSTAINABILITY: PRE-EVENT PLANNING and POST-EVENT WRAP-UP

Building successful partnerships with our venues and vendors to inspire forward thinking, problem solving and continued improvement *is the key to our success*. Convergence involves a complex map of stakeholders, decision makers, and implementers. We've continued to refine our process to ensure implementation of strategies that work to reduce our environmental impact and increase social impact, improve the accuracy and relevancy of our metrics (including diversion rate calculations for each event) and inspire best practices in sustainability across all levels of planning and implementation. We weave our commitment to sustainability throughout the process, from site selection to the post-event wrap-up.

Site Selection

We have included consistent questions in our RFPs that pertain to specific sustainability areas and communicate the Microsoft Events Team's commitment and consideration of sustainability in the site selection process.

Convergence 2011 convened in Atlanta, Georgia at the Georgia World Congress Center (GWCC). The GWCC's commitment to sustainability and successful coordination was instrumental in our implementation of sustainable event strategies, and influenced our decision to choose them as the main venue. Aspects of the GWCC that communicated their commitment to sustainability:

- The GWCC has many ["green" efforts](#), and after sustainability success with Microsoft events in 2009 and 2010, the GWCC hired a full time Sustainability Coordinator.
- Participant in the Atlanta Better Buildings Challenge in an effort to reduce energy and water consumption by 20% by 2020.
- Currently undergoing an ASHRAE Level I energy assessment as part of initial LEED for Existing Buildings' certification evaluation.

Establishing Accountability for Environmental and Social Goals

We engaged in extensive communication, information gathering and planning with the venue and vendors to ensure that sustainability efforts were successfully implemented on-site at Convergence.

- "Venue Sustainability Brief": This brief is developed through coordination with the venue, and ensures that the key stakeholders on the event team understand a venue/city's capabilities, and can then design an effective, measurable sustainability program around it.
- To ensure that sustainability plans and priorities are understood by all key stakeholders, we scheduled "Sustainability Check-in Calls" with the event's planning leads (food and beverage, expo, logistics etc.) during the pre-planning process for in-depth coordination.

- **Metrics and Data Gathering:** We designed a data gathering and tracking process which helps to both increase engagement and accountability for results from planners, venue and vendors. Well in advance of the event we communicated our sustainability metrics through tailored “cheat sheets” to the venue, planning leads and vendors to gather targeted data post-event. Through these cheat sheets we aim to “measure what matters.”

Telling the Story and Providing a Feedback Loop

Gathering information after the event is not only helpful to being able to tell the story about our efforts and to concretely define the effects; it also helps to keep planners and vendors accountable and gives us tangible information about where we can improve.

- Feedback is provided to event owners, planners, the venue and vendors through our “Post-Event Sustainability Report”. This report consolidates key metrics and successes and provides the highlights in an easy-to-understand context and story and highlights key opportunities and improvement areas for the next year.
- Feedback to attendees of key sustainability metrics and results is provided through social media and on the event [website](#) so attendees can also see the results.
- Feedback is solicited from attendees through the written (online) evaluations. For Convergence, there were about 90 comments made in the evaluation forms specifically about sustainability, most of them extremely positive.
- Promoting the sustainability results and successful partnerships to the industry. We received positive media coverage for Convergence, such as the following:
 - [“Microsoft Big Event Leaves Small Environmental Footprint.”](#)
Trade Show Executive Eco Alert, August 2011
 - [“Go Big & Go Green – GWCC Bumps Up The Green”](#) *Smart Meetings, September 2011*

“Bravo to Microsoft for making this [volunteer opportunity] part of the conference offering. This was my first experience and was a fantastic part of the conference which enabled a great amount of networking that otherwise would not have been available.”

“Appreciated reusable water bottle and soap to wash it out-nice touch. Very happy extra food went to the food bank, too.”

“I applaud Microsoft for doing this. What a great outreach to the community. You set a great example of what corporations should be doing.”

-- Attendee comments in written evaluations.

MINIMIZING THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT—SUCCESSFUL ON-SITE IMPLEMENTATION

Having gone through the extensive pre-planning process to inspire successful implementation of sustainability efforts, our planning leads take personal responsibility to verify that efforts are implemented as planned. Each lead coordinates with vendors on sustainability efforts to the same level of specification as they do on all other aspects of this world class event. For example, the food and beverage manager will walk through the event and back of the house areas and “dumpster dive” as needed to check that materials are being handled by event crew appropriately. These are the efforts successfully implemented at Convergence 2011:

Communication with Attendees

To help promote our efforts and ensure that attendees understand how they can contribute to the event's sustainable success, we:

- Ensured that the evidence of sustainability efforts was pervasive. For example, GWCC specifically designed signage for the bins to accurately reflect the waste stream for Convergence, and placed compost and recycling bins in meeting rooms to capture materials that would otherwise end up in the garbage.
- Included ample sustainability information in the conference guide, the [website](#), and in social media.
- Solicited input about how our sustainability efforts are being received by attendees, by including questions in our evaluation forms about our sustainability and outreach activities.



Energy Efficiency

We worked closely with the GWCC to communicate and coordinate our event schedule (particularly during load-in & load-out) to minimize AC and lighting as optimally as we could. The GWCC is committed to energy conservation and has:

- Exhibit hall lighting replaced (as of September 2011) in all 12 halls from 1,000 watt metal halides to 750 watt pulse-start metal halides. New lighting controls allow for individual fixture control, allowing for minimization of lighting as needed.
- Motion sensors installed in administrative offices, storage rooms and restrooms.
- Continuous internal education to reduce energy consumption and external collaboration with other convention centers by sharing data from the ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager.



Water Efficiency

We made specific steps to reduce water consumption at the event, including:

- Eliminating single use water bottles and providing attendees with a re-usable water bottle, water bubblers throughout the venue, and requesting that water glasses for meals are not pre-filled. We estimate that our effort reduced water consumption by at least 4,750 gallons¹, which equals about 79 average bath tubs full.
- The GWCC and vendors have implemented a number of practices to reduce the waste of water:
 - The food and beverage vendor use left over water from meals to water the plants, instead of dumping and using new.

¹ This calculation is conservative. It only accounts for the reduction due to the elimination of individual water bottles, and does not include the reduction from other efforts.

- Restroom faucets have aerators installed to restrict water use.
- Automatic sensors, low flush toilets and low flush urinals are installed as restroom upgrades are made. Currently approximately 60% have been installed.
- Irrigation upgrade includes soil moisture sensors and better monitoring and controls.
- Irrigation and water features are fed by two wells on campus.

Air Quality

Conference shuttles were provided to reduce the number of single occupancy vehicles during the event:

- The shuttles operate with a 5 minute no-idle rule.
- There were more than 24,471 attendee transfers made, keeping approximately 3,000 single occupancy rental cars off the road every day.
- 24% of the shuttle fleet was in “green” buses that have emission reduction technology.

The GWCC engages in various efforts to reduce air pollution, including:

- Reduced Idling Policy in partnership with the local Clean Air Campaign
- Green cleaning products and technologies are utilized throughout the facility whenever possible.
- CO2 sensors installed in each exhibit hall.

Environmental Purchasing

Extensive pre-planning is required to ensure environmentally sustainable purchasing decisions were made. *94% of event collateral, giveaways and food service ware purchased for Convergence were environmentally preferable.* Efforts were made to ensure that items were readily compostable or recyclable on site, and that when possible, products contained recycled content or other environmental benefits.

- All of the print collateral (3 guides equaling approximately 24 reams of paper) were printed on recycled paper, 30% post-consumer waste, with vegetable based inks and were recyclable on-site.
- Service ware which wasn't durable china was either recyclable or made of compostable material so that it was easy for attendees to recycle and compost on-site (7 food service products lines equaling 116,000 individual items were compostable.)
- Badge lanyards were made from 100% recycled PET and badge holders were 51% recycled polyester.
- Journal notebooks for attendees were made from 100% recycled chipboard cover, with 100% post-consumer recycled writing paper. Wire binding was made of 97% scrap metal with only 3% new steel.
- The attendee bag was made in partnership with BolderPath from the banners originally produced for Convergence 2010, and additional reclaimed outdoor signage.
 - Over 47,000 square feet of banner material was repurposed from the previous year's event.
 - 2,500 pounds of material was kept out of the landfill.
- GWCC has a sustainable Purchasing Policy in compliance with LEED.
 - Office and restroom paper products have recycled content.

Waste Minimization (Waste Reduction and Recycling)

Ensuring solid education and logistics for waste reduction and recycling efforts is one area we focus heavily on. We coordinated with the GWCC and vendors to ensure that the collection strategy is sufficient, staff and vendors are trained appropriately, and that materials are in fact being recycled or composted and not inadvertently ending up the landfill or waste incinerator. Convergence 2011 had phenomenal success in reducing waste, recycling, composting and donating to divert materials from the landfill.



Waste Reduction Strategies:

- Eliminated single use water bottles by providing re-usable water bottles and water bubblers. That is approximately 72,000 bottles for *each* Convergence event, end to end measuring 9.6 miles. Since 2008, Convergence events have kept approximately 288,000 water bottles out of the waste stream.
- As the event was held in the same city for 2010 and 2011, signage was strategically designed for re-use. Nearly 60% of the banner signage was able to be reused again in 2011. We also reduced hard copy signage waste by utilizing plasma screens for session signage.
- Re-used over 1,300 badge holders from the previous year that were collected from attendees after the show.
- Since 2008 we have eliminated the sponsor collateral which was previously provided in each of the attendee bags. This represented over approximately 50,000 pieces of collateral each event, and over 4 years this decision has kept 200,000 pieces (100 reams of paper) of paper from the waste stream, saving approximately 6 trees.²
- In the Expo hall, the plastic cover used to protect carpet during transit was kept to a minimum and re-used for move out.
- Exhibitors were encouraged during the pre-planning stage to minimize shipping and giveaways/collateral as much as possible, and reminded to re-use, recycle or donate left over items.

Recycling, Composting and Food Donation Strategies:

As previously stated, care was taken to ensure that materials provided during the event were reusable, recyclable or compostable (particularly in food service), and to eliminate problem materials for the compost stream such as individual condiment packets.

- Food waste and compostable service ware was segregated in an organized collection system, and sent to a composting facility (Closed Loop Organics).
- Recyclable materials such as paper, cans, bottles and cardboard were sent to a recycling facility (SP Recycling)
- Banners (858 lbs.) were sent (to BolderPath) for re-purposing into SWAG for Convergence 2012.

² Number of trees calculated using factors found at <http://conservatree.org/learn/EnviroIssues/TreeStats.shtml>

- 1.5 tons (approximately 1,000 meals) of usable food and over 1,200 left over giveaway items were donated to multiple agencies and organizations.

Waste Minimization Results:

Recycling of cardboard, cans, bottles and paper, and signage increased 57% from the prior year to 8.62 tons. The 60% diversion/recycling collection rate for Convergence 2011 is dramatic on its own when the average US recycling rate is around 33%, even though it is down slightly from the year before. More importantly, this year the total waste generated at the event **was reduced by 4 tons** over the prior year *even as the number of attendees increased.*

	2010	2011
Venue	Georgia World Congress Center	Georgia World Congress Center
Attendees	8494	9097
Tons Disposed as Garbage	20.73	20.19
Tons Recycled	5.48	8.62
Tons Food Donated	1.50	1.46
Tons Food Waste Composted	27.04	20.66
Total Tons Generated	54.75	50.93
Recycling and Donation Collection Rate³	62.14%	60.36%
lbs. per attendee	12.89	11.20

This impressive reduction in the amount of waste produced on site was a result of the strategies mentioned above, and:

- China service and other food waste reduction efforts kept approximately 7 tons of waste (including 25,000 plates) out of the waste stream.
- Increased focus on reducing waste, re-using or donating left over items from the Expo hall.

ECONOMIC INDICATORS

Convergence utilized the majority of the 3.9M sq. foot Georgia World Congress Center, with ten hotels contracted for sleeping rooms, and over 18,000 room nights actualized. The city of Atlanta estimates the “direct economic impact” (that is, dollars spent by attendees, exhibitors and the organization on and during the event) of Convergence 2011 to be \$18,450,000 on the local economy. Those numbers suggest that roughly half of the \$18.4 million spent in Atlanta on Microsoft Convergence became wages for local employees. These wages were spread across approximately 6,400 individuals during the course of the event. In doing so, these wages created the equivalent of 240 annual full-time jobs.

Convergence’s waste reduction initiatives have also had a significant impact on event cost savings:

- China service instead of disposable service ware saved the F&B vendor approximately \$6,000.
- Eliminating single use water bottles saved approximately \$72,000.
- Designing signage for re-use saved over \$28,000.

³ This is also called a “Diversion Rate.”

OUR COMMITMENT TO CHANGE & THE COMMUNITY

Local community outreach & engagement is an important focus as part our initiative's social/citizenship efforts. Onsite and offsite community efforts that were organized for Convergence 2011 included:

- Hundreds of volunteers stopped by the Community & Learning Center onsite at the event to paint murals/tiles which were later installed in the ICU wing of a local hospital (Shepherd Center). Volunteers completed 6 large Hospital Art pieces and 150 ceiling tiles.
- Over 100 volunteers installed play structures and refurbished the community center and library at a low-income housing development in Atlanta's Thomasville neighborhood the day before Convergence kicked off. A video of the day's efforts can be found [here](#).
- \$5 for each person that turned in an event evaluation form was donated to Youth Ensemble of Atlanta (YEA), a local performing troupe that empowers kids through the arts (to further integrate the community into our event, YEA performed onstage during one of the keynote sessions). **\$15,000** was raised and donated through this effort.
- As part of the evaluation prizes, \$20 charity gift cards were given away. Cards allow recipients to donate amount to any charity desired. **\$1,000** was donated through this effort.
- 1.5 tons (approximately 1,000 meals) of food was donated to Atlanta Union Mission, Jackson Memorial Food Pantry and the Atlanta Food Bank.
- Left over attendee giveaways (approximately 35 pens, 225 water bottles, 650 tote bags, 300 journals, 70 t-shirts, 1500 luggage tags and 2 boxes of games and books) were donated to the Forest Cove Apartments, Thomasville Community Center and the Thomasville Satellite Library.



OUR COMMITMENT TO CONSERVATION

At Microsoft, we're committed to software and technology innovations that help people and organizations around the world improve the environment. Our goals are to reduce the impact of our operations and products and drive responsible environmental leadership. More information about our company's environmental efforts can be found on our Environmental Sustainability [website](#).

Through the *Sustainable Events Initiative (SEI)*, Microsoft has been actively focusing on sustainability efforts at our events since 2008. Each year we have built upon successes. The SEI supports all of Microsoft's events, though focuses heavily on seven of the "Tier 1" events which have 7,000-15,000 attendees each. Through the framework of the SEI and the hard work and collaboration of planners, venues and vendors, we have collectively decreased our events' environmental footprint and increased our community involvement year over year.