

How the Specialty Food Association (SFA) Use Balluun to Create New Value, Revenue, and an Enduring Online Community



Case Study

Overview

Founded in 1952, the Specialty Food Association (SFA) built its legacy representing artisans, purveyors, importers, and others involved in the specialty food trade. Its membership grew through its educational content, advocacy, events, and both in-person and online networking opportunities for its members.



“Our vision is to shape the future of food, and we do that through our mission statement, which is championing, nurturing, connecting our members to innovative products, and expanding the consumption of specialty foods,” says Leo Squatrito, VP Events & Member Development, Specialty Food Association.

After their successful live Winter Fancy Food Show event in January 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the SFA to cancel its Summer Fancy Food Show in New York that year. SFA’s stakeholders knew they needed to explore digital options that would best serve industry buyers, exhibitors, and its diverse membership of specialty food businesses. They set out to find a platform that would support ongoing digital engagement with those same groups as well.

Challenges

“From our perspective, making it as easy as possible for our buyers to find exactly what they were looking for was key.”

- Leo Squatrito, VP Events & Member Development, Specialty Food Association (SFA)

Although the SFA had operated an online product marketplace for several years, the loss of their live event meant they needed a more enhanced digital solution—one that could facilitate high-quality engagement, discoverability, and lead generation for attendees and exhibitors at both a scale and a quality beyond those of their live events.

“Our first step was to meet with our buying community,” says Squatrito. *“They told us exactly what they were looking for in terms of a digital discovery platform: the ability to really dig into categories, subcategories, and product attributes was really key to them.”*

Their strategy called for a platform that could deliver new types of value as well. These included insights from analytics of activity during a digital event; but also, the foundational elements for building a digital community, one that would drive yearlong engagement, participation, and revenue for the SFA.

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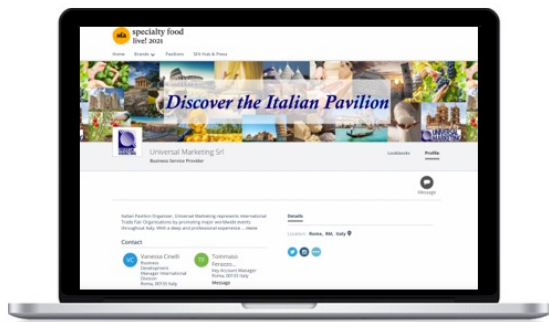


Case Study

Why Balluun?

“The key strength [of Balluun] was the ability to configure the discoverability element. We met with our buying community to find out what they wanted from a digital discovery platform and these insights were then integrated into the platform during the configuration process.”

- Leo Squatrito, VP Events & Member Development, Specialty Food Association (SFA)



After an extensive review of 12 possible digital platforms, SFA selected Balluun’s FlashEX™ solution to launch its Specialty Food LIVE! digital event—a standalone online experience that became more than a replacement for their canceled live event.

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We chose the Balluun platform for a number of reasons, but the main one was the way we’re able to configure the discoverability of products in the specialty food industry, a critical need for buyers and a business driver for the SFA. In addition, the ability to have our sellers proactively view new buyer prospects through the [matchmaking] component and then engage with them through the leads feature was a huge differentiator, compared to the 12 other platforms that we evaluated.

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Balluun also differentiated itself because it allows organizers to easily expand from running discrete digital events to a year-round model. With this capability, the SFA could expand the platform to offer “365 extension of events and year-round audience engagement,” said Squatrito. SFA stakeholders acknowledged Balluun’s comprehensive features, highly customizable interface, quick time-to-market, and the ability to deliver against their value proposition as key contributors to their decision as well.




Results


"We have held several Specialty Food Live! events on the Balluun platform over the last year. The feedback we receive from buyers and sellers gets better each time."

- Leo Squatrito, VP Events & Member Development, Specialty Food Association (SFA)

Launching a new digital marketplace experience was straightforward for the SFA team. In a matter of weeks, team members were trained to host a virtual experience that ultimately would support over 700 brands with 15,000 products sold worldwide. The simplicity with which their buyers, members, and exhibitors could use the platform and leverage its advanced capabilities was attractive.

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|---|---------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
|  specialty food live! 2021 | 700 brands | 15,000 products | 40,000 connections | 70,000 buyer leads |
|---|---------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|

While other platforms seek to simply recreate a trade show environment, Balluun's analytics, lead generation, and matchmaking capabilities allowed the SFA to provide much more for its buyer, member, and exhibitor community. "With all the customized product attributes and product fields we added to the platform for our sellers, Balluun has allowed us to make this a year-round platform," says Squatrito.

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|  fancy food 24/7 | 24/7/365 online community and extension to events |
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The insights and experience the SFA gained from running their digital events validated their choice of the Balluun platform to support their needs. The success also helped to boost their commitment to taking their digital strategy year-round by licensing the Engage365™ solution. Rebranded as Fancy Food 24/7, the platform will continue to host virtual events concurrently with the physical Fancy Food shows while providing their audience with discovery and engagement opportunities year-round.

For more information about Balluun's product or request a demo, contact bd@balluun.com.