



The Future of Genealogy Conferences

Lisa A. Alzo discusses futuristic possibilities for hosting family history meetings and events

PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERNS SINCE MARCH 2020 have had a significant cooling effect on conference organization and attendance. As a result, many of us have become familiar with Zoom, GoToWebinar, and WebEx to present and attend Webinars. Not surprisingly, there has been a shift in thinking for those organizing conferences. In terms of the time and cost savings alone, you can see why some conference organizers are looking toward permanently virtual events.

Current Model for Traditional and Virtual Conferences

Typically, conference speakers are allotted hour-long sessions to present their topics of interest, usually including 10 to 15 minutes set aside for questions and answers. Think of how many conference sessions you have attended, or webinars you have viewed, and you'll have to agree that most talks follow the same format, despite educational psychologists knowing for decades that the attention span of a typical student is only 15–20 minutes. Many of us may be older than college-age students, but the argument in favor of shorter talks remains valid – even in a virtual format. With distractions and perhaps not very exciting material to listen to, is it any wonder that we find our minds wandering after a few minutes? This situation is only going to be exacerbated since we must accept that we are living in a young person's world: a world in tune with YouTube, Twitter and TikTok. In young minds, there's little patience for protracted talks, and for the current genealogy demographic to welcome today's generation to participate. It's probably an appropriate time to consider adapting the current conference model to include new and dynamic means of presenting talks. These considerations, among others, must surely have occurred to the organizers of RootsTech in promotion of their 2022 virtual conference.

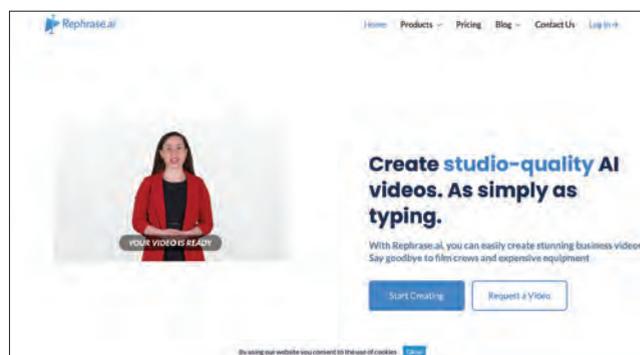
Avatar Presentations

By now, many genealogists have become familiar with

My Heritage's Deep Nostalgia™, www.myheritage.com/deep-nostalgia, still image animation software developed in collaboration with D-ID, www.d-id.com, a Tel Aviv, Israel-based company. Deep Nostalgia™ was introduced in February 2021, and I reviewed the software in a preceding article (*Internet Genealogy*, 2021 August/September). Although some viewers have described animation of their deceased relatives' and distant ancestors' images as unsettling, my own thoughts are positive. I am in awe of the technology and (in my opinion) the animated images make the subjects more relatable. It's worth noting that My Heritage chose to not have Deep Nostalgia's animated subjects appear to talk even though it's entirely possible. However, MyHeritage introduced LiveStory at RootsTech 2022, <https://blog.myheritage.com/2022/03/introducing-livestory-give-voice-to-your-family-stories>. A review of this new feature will appear in a future issue of *Internet Genealogy*.

Imagine then a scenario in which the combination of conference rethinking and advances in computer technology has the potential to change how we might attend virtual and possibly hybrid genealogy events. No headsets or controllers are required.

Remembering 1980s Max Headroom (prophetically enhanced Canadian American actor Matt Frewer), movies such as *Simone* (2002), *Avatar* (2009), and latterly Fox's hyper-realistic creations in music competition show *Alter-Ego*, it's easy to dismiss avatars



Advances in software and computer processing power now make it possible to accept an avatar as a normal presenter.