

# Gearing up to restart Europe's tech conference circuit

Maddyness columnist Victor Snyder, an executive leadership coach, spoke with Sumit Pal, who works in business development for Lendit Fintech, about the return of in-person business conferences.

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The conference circuit plays a huge role in the way executives run their businesses. In my own practice as an executive coach, making the most of these opportunities is a top agenda item among my clients, who are keen to network, present and even close deals at these types of events.

Much has been written about the migration of conferences from the physical world to virtual spaces during the pandemic, with *a summer 2020 study* from TrustRadius finding that 43% of tech workers attended between one and three online events *each week*. But the truth is, when it comes to building relationships, there's nothing like shaking someone's hand in person.

With some 14 years of experience in the events and conference industry under his belt, Sumit Pal is about to start his fourth year as a key player on the business development team of Lendit Fintech. Operating out of London, he helps make events, both virtual and physical, happen for the financial services and banking tech circuit, both in Europe and beyond.

I recently spoke with Pal about conferences in Europe compared to the rest of the world, the hottest functionalities that fintech startups are addressing, and how to keep people engaged with events - both online and offline.

Given your experience in the events and conference industry around the world, how would you characterise conferences in Europe as being distinct? How do European startups approach conferences differently from startups from other parts of the world?

I believe that a significant distinction between conferences in Europe from other parts of the world is regulation. Over the past few years, I have seen some fantastic work done by the EU regulators (including the UK, pre-B-word), fueling/supporting innovation.

GDPR policy, innovation in open and digital banking, the rapid acceleration in the biotech ecosystem in Europe, are just some of the many examples.

In my experience, I have noticed European startups are proactive in their approach to attending conferences from startups from other parts of the world. For example, it is usual practice in my role to manage relationships with customers of competitive technology or service offerings.

Back in 2018, while working on LendIt's Europe conference, I managed relationships with two fintech companies that offer ID verification as a solution. One was born in Zurich and the other in San Francisco. The one from Zurich had plans to be at two different conferences in the two months leading up to the end of the year, whereas the one from San Francisco had eight more to go in the same time frame.

Both of these companies have now raised Series B level of funding, mind you, so it seems like both the approaches worked.

During the pandemic, when all events went virtual, what were the biggest surprises you encountered at LendIt?

The need for creativity was the biggest surprise I encountered at LendIt Fintech during the pandemic.

Even pre-pandemic, I advocated using our conferences as a channel of continuous engagement rather than only a big bang approach to our customers. Don't get me wrong – I have nothing against 200+ square feet of exhibition booths, and networking events have been highly effective on many occasions at our in-person conferences. However, in a B2B marketing world, better results are seen for someone to become a customer when there has been a series of engagements.

Finding fresh ways to keep conversations going, across and in between several events – that's what we're trying to facilitate.

## How would you characterise Europe's fintech startups' biggest opportunities to integrate with traditional financial institutions? What kinds of tech are the banks most interested in incorporating?

I believe the most significant opportunities for European fintech startups are in the space of Buy Now Pay Later (BNPL), Point of Sale lending (POS) and Decentralised Finance (DeFi).

Financial institutions are actively seeking partnership opportunities with fintechns in these areas without developing capabilities on their own.

## From your perspective, what leadership qualities make someone a great public speaker at conferences?

A great public speaker should keep their audience engaged on the topic they are presenting on. Probably a cliché, but that's the job, right?

## Having passed the halfway mark of 2021, what in-person events are you most looking forward to attending in

# Europe, both under the Lendit umbrella and in general?

Within Europe, Web Summit in Lisbon is one of the events on my list, and if Fintech Lithuania in Vilnius goes ahead, then I will look forward to attending that too. Some exciting fintechs are coming out of the Baltics, and that event is an excellent opportunity to network with up and coming fintechs from Eastern Europe.

It's outside of Europe, but Fintech Nexus is on the top of my list. This is a new event in our arsenal at Lendit, a new format with *no content* - our community will gather in Miami on 1-2 September to network with each other. We expect 10,000+ meetings to take place at Fintech Nexus over the two days.

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