

Organizing a Successful Conference

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Working in either academia or industry, researchers will attend numerous conferences. To ensure the precious time and tight budget spent on conferences rewarding, they are often very cautious when making the decision of which conferences to attend. Therefore, conference organizers have to be aware of factors that will affect the decisions of potential attendees in order to motivate them to attend the conferences. Also, the organizers have to secure the success of the conference to attract returning attendees as well as their colleagues in the future. Then what are the biggest attendance motivators? And what make a conference successful?

We just came back from the International Conference and Exhibition on Nanotechnology & Nanomedicine (Nano-2012) held on March 12-14 in Omaha, NE, which was organized by the OMICS publishing group. The conference had successfully attracted more than 100 researchers in the worlds; some of the speakers demonstrated their top-notch work in their fields; the organizers did a great job in helping everyone for their needs; and maybe one of the most important issues was that the food were delicious and recreation party was great! However, some issues remain to be improved. As editorial board members of several OMICS publications, we would like to share our discussions on approaches to make the conference more successful and we would listen to our fellow colleagues and attendees on their opinions since we may help OMICS organize some of the future conferences.

High Quality Talks and Networking

On top of everything, a successful conference will certainly offers new insights, inspire new ideas and provide new opportunities of networking. Nano-2012 was great on this aspect, although with a small number of attendees as expected for a young conference that has not yet gained much reputation. The conference program covered a wide range of topics in nanotechnology and nanomedicine. Many talks were excellent. There were a significant number of inspiring discussions among attendees after the talks and during the networking time. One of the major setbacks of the conference was the cancellation of the presentations. The reasons may be multiple and one of them was the late schedule. The attendees did not receive the final schedule until days before the conference, which made them wondering about the attendance rate of the conference. Also, some of the attendees would expect to have a chance to talk to influential keynote speakers, which they consider as a critical issue of the success of a conference. This may be readily avoided by confirming with the invited speakers or arranging new speakers promptly.

Models of the Conference

Each conference has its unique model and character. Among many successful conferences, Gordon research conferences and Pittcon attracted a lot of attendees because their uniqueness, such as late night discussions of Gordon and trade show for the laboratory equipment industry of Pittcon, and one should not neglect another reason of their success - yes, their relatively low registration fees, which makes it possible for a large number of students to attend. If OMICS cannot make the regular registration fee lower, for any reasons, OMICS should consider to lower the registration fees to students to a significant low

number, or even free. Other approaches include poster awards, partial support for the travel or lodging, etc. We also agree with a suggestion from Dr. Silvia Muro (Univ. Maryland) that OMICS may hold the conference together with other well-recognized conferences to attract more attendance.

Great Destination

It is not a secret that, for both domestic and international attendees, the location of a conference does matter! For many people a tourist city with more activities close to the conference venue would be more preferable. Partially because of this, less attendee was from domestic. A large number of international researchers attended Nano-2012. However, a quick survey showed that many of them were the first to come to the US and they expected to look around besides attending the conference. They are somehow disappointed, although Omaha is indeed a charming city and several of us did enjoy a tour to a pottery studio, which was not of significant interests to international speakers. Furthermore, the travel cost to an unpopular city is in general more expensive than to a tourist city for various reasons, which will further diminish the chances for students to attend.

Professional Organization

Effective organizing is critical for the success of a conference. Straightforward registration, easy access to hotel reservation with a conference code, and friendly services from the early stage of abstract submission to the end of the conference are all very important. The organizers of Nano-2012 is a good job in organizing the conference, however, any minor issues would damage the enthusiasm of the attendees, such as late responses to inquiries and inefficiency of the organizing office, which may mainly due to the lack of staffs. One solution to this might be to recruit student volunteers to provide support for the conference. Students' enthusiastic participation can enhance the conference experience for all attendees. Again, providing travel funds to selected students and holding a poster competition will help motivate more students to attend.

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