



Bidding for a conference

Bidding for a conference can be exhilarating and stressful

Edinburgh Ambassadors who have experienced these high levels of competition were asked for their comments so we can all benefit from their insights. We hope that their responses will help you!

The Fear Factor

How much time will it take from my very busy schedule? This is the first question asked by many when we asked them to consider bidding for a professional conference.

From Brian Wareham, Crimestoppers:

"I received an email out of the blue from the Edinburgh Convention Bureau asking if I would be interested in holding the Crime Stoppers International Conference in Edinburgh. Because of my current situation I thought a short email back politely saying no thanks would have answered the question, but after a series of emails in which I gave a number of excuses e.g. ill health, pending retirement, a new Chief Executive, etc I had a visit from a very personable young lady who was very persuasive that I should consider bidding for the Conference."

Brian is still uncertain about the commitment required to run an international conference:

"On the plus side there is an enthusiastic Convention Bureau team to assist in the bidding process and the planning of the Conference, but I am very nervous of the massive commitment for a charity, resource implications, costs and the responsibility. My heart tells me that I would dearly love to run this Conference in Edinburgh but my brain is still weighing up the pros and cons before I make that final decision."

Win or lose we learn

Edinburgh Ambassadors who have lost bids offer valuable insight – and sometimes they consider re-bidding, using the lessons they've learned.

Edinburgh Ambassador Jane Bates submitted the BMUS bid for the World Federation of Ultrasound in Medicine and Biology at the European and international level, and lost to Sydney after a great deal of work and some expense to the organisation.

Jane reports: "Clearly the political side of things played an important role, and Paul Allan did his best to contact the WFUMB council to find out what their issues were and address them. Clearly Sydney put substantial funding into their bid which, with their experience with previous Olympic bid, put them in a strong position."

Political factors on the executive committee are hidden factors that prevent a level playing field. The Edinburgh Ambassador is best placed to learn what is going on behind the scenes, but often this is not possible and we resort to reading tea leaves.

Case Study: David Keen

Edinburgh Ambassador David Keen reflects on losing a bid to host the XVII INQUA (International Union of Quaternary Sciences) August 2007. Competition: Cairns and Tokyo.

What were the factors that made you decide to bid for this conference?

| The UK has traditionally been strong in Quaternary Science and in 2007 it will be 30 years since the Congress was last in the UK. The last two Congresses were far from Europe

(Durban, 1999; Reno, 2003). We were motivated also by our concern that a third conference far from the base of many of the members of INQUA was too expensive especially for young researchers.

In the summer of 2002, the national body for INQUA (The Quaternary Research Association of Britain and Ireland) suggested a bid for the Congress. In addition to the attractions of Edinburgh as a conference destination, it was chosen because England had the Congress the last time INQUA was in the UK.

How do you rate the assistance available from the Edinburgh Ambassador Programme and the Edinburgh Convention Bureau?

The assistance was all that could be wished for. The production of the bid document was smooth and the quality of it was widely praised when it was distributed at the Reno Congress. Discussions with ECB staff were always very positive and any questions answered clearly and quickly.

What were the factors that led to winning or losing this bid?

As an Earth Science Congress, field trips are an integral part. We tried to “sell” this on the basis of European trip offers from Ireland, Denmark, Norway, Netherlands, Belgium and France to make the bid a more than UK production. At the discussion in the International Council, the European component went down very well (especially with other Europeans) and we gained votes for Edinburgh because of this.

However it was Cairns who won the bid. The major factors in Australia winning the next Congress were

1. This was their second try, giving them an immediate advantage. We have been asked to bid again for 2011 and it seems this will put us in pole position.
2. They made a great play of the fact that only two previous Congresses had been held in a Southern Hemisphere country (New Zealand in 1966 and Durban in 1999). Their presentation was very professional, not hugely more so than ours, but enough to tip the balance when the other facts were also considered.
3. A political factor was a decision earlier in the business of the International Council to allow voting rights to all delegations present even if they were behind with their subscription. Thus, a number of Asian countries were allowed a vote, which they would not have done under the old rules.

What would you have done differently?

I did not use a power point presentation. Both of our competitors did and I would certainly use one in a second bid attempt.

How was the Tokyo bid received? They lost to Cairns because of the too overt lobbying by their delegates, some of whom only attended the Reno Congress for this purpose. There were also serious concerns in the discussions at the International Council about the cost of Tokyo, a heading under which Edinburgh scored very well.

So the lessons to be learned?

Bidding for a conference is time-consuming, nerve-wracking and not always successful – but if you don’t try, you’ll never succeed. And with the team here at the ECB working closely with you, you’ll benefit from our wealth of experience – including the things not to do!

Any questions?

If you have questions about bidding for a conference, or any other aspect of holding a conference in Edinburgh, please contact the Edinburgh Convention Bureau on 0131-473 3666 or email us at info@conventionedinburgh.com

