



# Cutting edges in conference technology

What are the current cutting edges in conference technology? What are they worth to the organiser?

These questions were put to professional conference organisers and Edinburgh Ambassadors with experience in the cutting edge application of technology. We are grateful to acknowledge information received from Concorde Services and Meeting Makers, The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh and the EICC.

## Virtual reality

The virtual conference creates a stimulating and supportive learning environment and if you are aiming at reaching individuals in remote corners of the world who are perhaps not able to travel or cannot afford to, this mechanism offers access. However, 'real time' conferences offer the great advantage of networking opportunities, in both a formal and interactive educational context. Can the two approaches be combined to offer the greatest advantages? The answer is yes – web broadcasting of a real-time conference can allow far flung delegates access to the real-time conference. Speakers who are unable to attend can broadcast their presentations to live audiences.

## Cutting edge surgery!

Medical conferences in Edinburgh have utilised cutting edge technology to enhance the conference programme. Relaying of live surgery has been very successful at the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh (RCSE) during their annual Urology Symposium. Real time links to remote surgery allow an expert surgeon to demonstrate an operation to an audience when the surgeon might not have the required credentials to operate in the country of the conference destination. The RCSE regularly offer multi-point video conferencing facilities using either their in-house systems, and hire additional equipment for live surgery conference requirements.

## Internet links

Recently, Winton House has upgraded its technology to include video conferencing and instant web access. The Edinburgh International Conference Centre has provided web casting of conferences with live footage of the speakers. In a recent conference, emailed questions were answered by the speakers at the EICC-based conference. If satellite links are used, these need to be scheduled in advance and microwave links are more common.

The cost of real time surgery or speaker link-ups needs to be evaluated against the cost of travel and accommodation for the speaker.

## Exhibitions

'Virtual exhibitions' can add greatly to the conference exhibition. Organisers sell exhibition space on the web and potential exhibitors can access the floor plan to determine size, shape and position before they buy space. Delegates may access the virtual exhibition to make appointments with exhibitors or make product comparisons before deciding whom to visit. Certainly the more access exhibitors have to delegates, the happier they will be so this is a unique selling point for conference organisers and the technology should pay for itself. Exhibiting companies still want face-to-face contact with those they are selling to, so the real time exhibition will not be undermined.

## Poster sessions

Can technology be applied to poster sessions? Can it make poster presentations more exciting or expand the number of posters beyond the space limits of the venue? Janet Glover from Concorde Services suggests the use of 'interactive whiteboards with a presenter's poster on disk' and a touch sensitive screen to enable presenters and viewers to access information.

## Online information & registration

Fairly standard web-based technology allows delegates easier access to conference information and enables conference organisers to more efficiently handle the submission of abstracts, abstract review, and on-line accommodation booking. According to Concorde Services, 'around 75% of people are making use of on-line delegate registration on the average event.'

Copies of abstracts and proceedings are now more frequently available from the internet or CD Roms, replacing books and offering potential for sponsorship. Interactive CD Roms allow presentations to be seen as they took place so can be used for ongoing training/reference.

Where technology does enhance the programme, and is cost-effective, there is no doubt that it can make great improvements.

## Your opinion

What is your experience? We would like to hear from Edinburgh Ambassadors who have used 'cutting edge' technology as conference organisers or viewed the results as delegates. In your opinion how do Edinburgh venues rate compared to other international destinations?

## Any questions?

If you have questions or opinions on cutting edge technology, or on 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](mailto:info@conventionedinburgh.com)