**Our Guide to Organising a TechTrain Conference**

***by***

**TechNet SA - Organisers of TechTrain 2004**

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**Introduction**

*Our* *Guide to Organising a TechTrain Conference* has been collated by TechNet SA, organisers of the TechTrain 2004 conference at the University of Adelaide, July 1-2 2004. TechNet SA is a group of technical staff from South Australia’s three Universities – the University of Adelaide, Flinders University and the University of South Australia. The group aims to promote networking and staff development opportunities for technical staff in higher education in South Australia.

The journey to TechTrain 2004 began at the 2001 conference in Brisbane. At the closing session when the question was asked about which Universities would be interested in hosting future conferences, delegates from two Universities put up their hand – one of which was the University of Adelaide. When questioned they cautiously expressed an interest in the idea, stating that the daunting task could possibly be achieved as a collaborative effort between the three S.A. Universities. This was effectively the start of TechNet SA.

By TechTrain 2002, a commitment had been made to the 2004 conference. In November 2002 TechNet SA ran it’s first inter-university forum – a one-day mini-conference for technical staff from the 3 local Universities, featuring 9 oral presentations including a keynote speaker. This first attempt provided valuable experience in planning, programming, publicity, booking venues, coordinating speakers and organising catering. Serious planning for the TechTrain 2004 conference began in early 2003.

This publication basically outlines how the committee did it. It is *not* intended to state the right and wrong way of doing things, but merely as a useful guide to perhaps make it easier for future organisers of TechTrain or TechNet conferences. With no prior experience per se in event management, we certainly would have found something like this useful - hopefully others will too.

**Getting started**

Firstly, allow *plenty of time* – ideally substantially more than 12 months. We started getting serious about planning about 16 months before the event. Any less than that would have been virtually impossible for us. (Even if you can afford the luxury of a conference organiser, they will probably also require that amount of time).

Once an expression of interest has been made, do a bit of an unofficial *feasibility study*. Firstly, start talking to your colleagues and get people excited about the concept. Talk to your supervisor, then Head of School and Staff Development Unit. Get approval from the Executive Director of Administration and the office of Vice Chancellor before making any definite plans. There’s no point in going ahead if you don’t have the support of your University.

Establish a dedicated hard-working committee, preferably with 8-10 keen, reliable members from various disciplines. Diversity is important. Our committee consisted of people from 3 different Unis, and included a laboratory manager, technical officers from laboratories, nursing and workshops, an OH&S officer, a technical assistant and a school executive officer.

One essential criteria when choosing the committee members is good teamwork skills – it will be essential when the going gets tough! Good written and verbal communication skills, time management skills and attention to detail will also be required. (Most of these attributes are second nature to technical staff!) It is also important to have some people experienced in financial management and perhaps information technology.

Several of our committee attended a half-day *University Conference Organisers Workshop* promoted by our University’s Staff Development Units and facilitated by the Adelaide Convention and Tourism Authority (ACTA). It was an extremely valuable couple of hours and we strongly recommend a similar course be undertaken by anyone planning to hold a University conference. It certainly gave us some useful tips on how to get started in the planning process. ACTA were also very helpful later in providing us with tourism information for delegates. ACTA is a member of the Meetings Industry Association of Australia. No doubt other chapters of this organisation exist interstate and it’s likely that as in SA, your University will be affiliated with them. Ask your Staff Development Unit.

**Subcommittees**

Once your committee is officially formed and you have had your initial meetings, make a list of every possible thing that you can think of that needs to be achieved in order to make the conference happen. The list becomes much less daunting when jobs are delegated to *subcommittees*. We chose to have five subcommittees:

Social/Venue/Accommodation

Publicity/Sponsorship

Program/Speakers

Finance/Registrations

Logistics

Membership of subcommittees need not necessarily be restricted to members of the main committee – outsiders may just want to help in a particular area. Each of our subcommittees met independently of the organizing committee and a member from each subcommittee reported their progress to the main committee.

These subcommittees were essential in the early stages, but we found that as the conference became closer the boundaries became blurred and many tasks were best undertaken by individuals or shared by the whole committee. Nevertheless, our tasks were initially split amongst the subcommittees in the following manner:

|  |
| --- |
| **SUBCOMMITTEES**  **1. Social/Venue/Accommodation**  Book venue  Need 1 main lecture theatre and at least 4 break out rooms  Need area near lecture theatres for morning/afternoon teas/lunches  Need nearby open area for trade exhibit, innovations display, poster display – liaise with Program/Speakers committee  Organise poster boards  Book venue for conference dinner  Organise options for on campus accommodation  Organise options and special deals for hotel accommodation  Investigate special interstate airline deals for delegates  Organise post-conference sightseeing tours  Organise possible pre-conference drinks  Liaise with Logistics committee on set up for conference dinner, lunches, morning/afternoon teas, wine/cheese tasting.  Organise secure room for valuables.  Set up message board  Arrange for portable microphone or PA system    **2. Publicity/Sponsorship**  Organise information pack for distribution  Email all previous TechTrain delegates, TechNet ‘members’, university technical staff in other states  Work with Finance committee to put together and distribute sponsorship document  Secure sponsors  Suggest theme for conference  Design logo for conference  Design, implement and regularly update website  Arrange printing of brochures, conference booklet, programs  Arrange signage on the day (directions to venue), banner(s), sponsors)  Organise printing of evaluation forms for speakers and for overall conference    **3. Program/Speakers**  Secure speakers for: Keynote address x 2, Plenary sessions x 2  Call for papers using email list. Can be in form of:  Talk  Poster  Innovation display  Put program together in four nominated streams  Nominate session chairpersons & notify them of their role  Liaise with Social/Venue/Accommodation committee for room bookings for talks, poster exhibits, trade exhibits, innovations display  Contact speakers re audio visual requirements  Get speakers and poster exhibitors to provide abstracts for inclusion in booklet and on website  Get speakers to provide their introductions and pass these onto appropriate chairpersons    Ensure speakers know allocated starting/finishing times/venues  Ensure poster exhibitors know guidelines for poster size etc.  Organise site visits/on campus tours and buses  Organise speaker’s gifts  Organise trade exhibitors  Organise display of posters  Organise innovation displays  Organise handout and collection of speaker’s evaluation forms  **4. Finance/Registrations**  Formulate conference budget  Work with Publicity/Sponsorship committee to put together and distribute sponsorship document  Set registration/early bird registration fee  Set up conference account/Visa card  Set up database of delegate’s details  Handle all income and expenses  Liaise with sponsors  Organise satchels/backpacks and contents  Badges for delegates  Certificate of attendance (for delegates and speakers)  Supervise registration desk and secretariat  Organise notice of appreciation to sponsors, trade exhibitors, volunteers      **5. Logistics**  Second a group of volunteers and delegate jobs  Organise catering including morning/afternoon teas x 4, lunches x 2  Set up area for lunch, afternoon/morning teas, wine/cheese tasting - liaise with S/V/A committee  Organise wine/cheese tasting  Organise conference dinner – menu, drinks, table decorations, entertainment, speaker, lecturn, microphone – liaise with S/V/A committee  Finalise audio visual requirements (for speakers and displays), clip-on microphones, roving microphone, timers, water jug, cups, laser pointers, whiteboard markers etc., speaker’s gifts  Ensure PowerPoint presentations are loaded prior to each session  Organise banner (PP) as background to talks  Organise set up of main lecture theatre – greenery etc if required.  Organise set up and manning of registration desk/secretariat – tables, tablecloths, signage, chairs, pens (or use an office?)  Delegate guides for site visits  Arrange video recording of talks  Supply velcro, scissors for posters  Supply power and extension cords for innovation displays  Arrange printing of evaluation forms  Organise official photographer |

**4. Budget**

**5. Setting a Date**

Decide when the most convenient time would be for maximum people to attend. For technical staff the obvious times are between semesters or during semester breaks. Take into consideration the fact that different states may have variations in their University Calenders. Traditionally the TechTrain conferences have been held during the first week in July but other times need not be ruled out.

Start with a preferred date and check availability of your venue. If you wish to have your Vice Chancellor(s) to officially open the conference, confirm their availability as well as that of any keynote speakers that you may have in mind. Once the date is set, it really feels like you have achieved something already!

**6. Selecting a Venue**

If the conference is to be hosted by a single University, there may be a restricted choice of venue. The ideal venue will have, within close proximity of each other, a main lecture theatre with seating for up to 250 for plenary sessions, and at least four breakout rooms with a capacity to seat up to 50 people each. Ideally have a fifth small room available for a storage/preparation area. A large room is required for morning/afternoon teas and lunches, with adjacent kitchen area and room for trade displays. All of these should be within close proximity. Additionally an open foyer area is required for registration and social gatherings, and poster/innovation displays. Consideration must also be given to the catering facilities – there may be special packages that include the use of on-campus caterers. When enquiring about the hire costs find out details of audiovisual facilities available and if technical/IT support is included.

TechNet SA had 3 Unis and their respective campuses to choose from and it took us a long time to settle on one. Commercial Conference venues were considered and some time was spent costing and inspecting hotels and other convention facilities only to find they were way out of our price range. We decided to stay within the University system then narrowed it down to a centrally located campus which was easily accessible by public transport and had a range of affordable accommodation options close by.

There will probably be someone in Central Administration in your University whose role is to organise on campus conferences, and they will be able to suggest a suitable venue that will be available on your chosen dates. Also try searching your University website for conference facilities. For our conference, Adelaide Uni was selected by us as being the most central and offered a competitive package.

**Accommodation Portfolio**

A subcommittee worked on an accommodation portfolio aimed to create options available for delegates to share accommodation and reduce costs. They used the resources available through ACTA (Adelaide Convention and Tourism Authority) via their brochures and website, and organised one on one meetings.

Location and costs were taken into account. Ideally the accommodation needed to be within walking distance of the Uni, or a short bus ride. All levels of price range were considered and personal recommendations were taken into account.

A list of prospective places was created, personal inspections organised and quotes gained. By liaison with the selected venues, conference discounts were negotiated. The accommodation portfolio once finalised, was posted with prices listed, on the conference website 5 months prior to the event to assist with delegate’s planning.

**8. Marketing**

Once the date and venue are set, it’s time to start getting down to business. For a professional approach to the conference you will need a theme and a logo - preferably with some remote connection between the two! If you get stuck there will be professionals at your Uni who may be able to help. Have several options for the committee to choose from. Whatever you do, ensure your conference is unique to your University – you don’t have to do exactly what others have done and don’t feel you need to engage in any one-upmanship. One of the highlights of each conference has been how different they have all been.

**9. Website**

The next step is getting the message out there. You will need a conference website - this is where your IT person will be helpful. The website can either be a stand alone, or perhaps a link from another Uni website (eg the Staff Development Unit).

Your website designer should check out previous TechTrain websites before completely re-inventing the wheel…………………………………………

**10. Publicity**

We relied heavily on emails for most of our publicity. The first persons we contacted 7 months prior to the conference, were the delegates who attended the previous TechTrain (see Appendix 1.1, 1.2 for delegates from 2004 and 2003 – note there will be some duplication). The next mail out a few weeks later was a call for abstracts (see below) and went to a more extensive list of people including those from other TechTrains.

We also contacted each Australian University by searching the web for email addresses of a contacts in each Staff/Career Development Unit (some of which were particularly hard to locate). Information about the conference was sent, along with the call for abstracts, and we requested that it be distributed to all technical staff in their Uni. See email list in Appendix 1.3.

At 4 months pre conference, we did another web search, this time for the Media/Publicity offices at each Uni. We collated a list and sent an email requesting that a notice be placed in the respective staff newsletters. We had a mixed response to this – some Unis said no, some yes, some said we’d have to pay (we didn’t get back to them!) and some didn’t reply at all. See email list in Appendix 1.4.

At 3 months, each committee member was asked to search the websites of Uni’s in a designated state for email addresses of key people in technical positions throughout each Uni. It was a time consuming job, but worth it in the end (we hope!). Appendix 1.5 contains our lists from NSW, Victoria and Tasmania. Lists from SA, WA and the ACT are not included.

From this time onwards, regular emails (roughly monthly to fortnightly) were sent out reminding people about the conference and directing them to the website. We also printed off flyers for displaying on notice boards around the SA campuses.

**11. Call for Abstracts**

We decided to call for abstracts more than 6 months before the conference, ensuring that people received the information prior to the Christmas break. We noted the format previous TechTrain organisers had used and also searched the web for other conference websites to get ideas on layout and guidelines for abstract, paper and poster formats. This is what we decided upon:

**Invitation**

**TechNet SA** invites all University technical staff to participate in the TechTrain 2004 conference. Hosted jointly by the University of Adelaide, the University of South Australia and Flinders University, this 6th national conference for technical staff will be held at the University of Adelaide, July 1-2, 2004.

With the theme, ***Growing Together***the conference will affirm TechNet’s commitment to promote networking and the professional and personal development needs of technical staff in Australia’s Universities. The world-renowned environmental biologist and "frog expert" **Assoc. Prof. Mike Tyler, AO** will be the keynote speaker. Patron of the conference will be **Mr. Robert Champion de Crespigny AC**, Chancellor of the University of Adelaide.

As this may be the last TechTrain conference before a pending name change, it will be a must to attend. The programme will include plenty of opportunities for networking with workshops for special interest groups, a conference dinner and an informal pre-conference welcome reception. The conference venue is close to Adelaide’s Botanic Gardens, Zoo, Art Gallery, museums, shops, cafes and restaurants. Come and enjoy Adelaide in July and the delights of South Australia’s food, wine and hospitality.

For further information about TechTrain 2004 contact Peter Kay by e-mail: peter.kay@adelaide.edu.au or ph. (08) 8303 5458, or see the TechNet SA website: http://technetsa.bio.flinders.edu.au.

**If you are a University technical staff member, TechTrain 2004 is about**

**your career, your colleagues, it’s your conference**.

**Call for Abstracts**

The Organising Committee of TechTrain 2004 invites the submission of abstracts for consideration in the final programme. Contributions will be presented as an oral paper, poster or innovation display. For those indicating their preference for a poster format or innovation display, a specific time in the programme will be scheduled for author attendance.

Diversity in topics is encouraged. Several broad streams will be established according to papers submitted. These may include: **Effective Work Practices; New Applications & Design; Occupational Health & Safety; and Biomedical & Life Sciences**. Ideally topics will encompass developments, activities and applications in teaching, research and infrastructure support services across the spectrum of technical professions. Example areas may include but are not limited to: management, career development, technical support for teaching, instrumentation, information technology, engineering, research and development, laboratory techniques, safe operating procedures, nursing, health science, biotechnology, environmental and biological sciences. If you have built or developed something, implemented a new method or procedure, got some interesting results, or are simply working smarter, then share it with others. The TechNet SA Committee welcomes your contribution. Guidelines for abstract format are listed below.

**Abstract Guidelines**

The Organising Committee of TechTrain 2004 invites submissions for consideration in the final programme. An abstract of no more than 250 words is required by May 21, 2004. Full papers are required by June, 4, 2004. All abstracts must be original work and presenting authors will be required to register for TechTrain 2004. Abstract acceptance acknowledgement will be sent to presenting authors together with instructions for presentation as an oral paper, poster or innovation display.

The purpose of the abstract is to summarise the presentation to an audience. It is the responsibility of the presenting author to ensure accuracy of content, spelling and presentation, as abstracts and will be published as submitted into the Conference Proceedings. Full papers will be printed on CD-Rom.

**Formatting Instructions**

Authors are required to indicate if they wish to present their work as an oral paper, poster or innovation display. Abstracts and papers should be submitted as WORD documents in Arial font, size 11-point.

**Title:** UPPERCASE, bold and centred. Insert a one-line space between the title and the author’s name. The title should give a clear indication of the subject content.

**Author(s) name:** (first name, surname) in Title Case, bold and centred. Insert one line.

**Affiliation:** (department/faculty/school, institute, city, state), centred*.*

**Email address:** (in brackets). Insert two lines.

**Body text:** single spaced with left and right justified text. Insert a one-line space between paragraphs and do not indent.

Format of the **full paper** should be as above and include headings such as **Abstract** (as submitted), **Introduction, Methods** and **Conclusion.** Full papers should not exceed 4 pages in length.

**Example Abstract Format:**

**QUALITY ASSURANCE: FINDING ITS PLACE IN THE ENGINEERING WORKSHOP**

**Peter Kay**

School of Chemical Engineering, The University of Adelaide, Adelaide, SA

(peter.kay@adelaide.edu.au)

On the 13 May 1999 The School of Chemical Engineering, University of Adelaide, embarked on the journey of establishing the International Standard ISO 9001 Quality Assurance Systems. This system ensures that the School of Chemical Engineering continually improves the delivery quality of services to its students, its clients and its other stake holders. The three components are:

1) The Intrinsic Quality of its services

2) The Quality of delivery of its services

3) The Quality of its Management Systems

The day to day services provided by the workshop are part of this system, which is now following the path of continually developing processes and systems, to maintain certification of compliance to the ISO 9001 International Standards.

Email abstracts and papers to: **alana.hansen@flinders.edu.au.**

Emails with this information were sent out regularly leading up to the conference and the information also appeared on the website.

We found it best to acknowledge receipt of abstracts by return email and to copy and paste the abstract into a separate file. Don’t worry too much if they are slow to come in. Our abstract deadline was set to 6 weeks prior to the conference and we really stepped up the publicity at about 8 weeks, then started coercing some local people into giving talks. In some cases they were classified as "invited speakers" and not necessarily expected to pay a registration fee. Fortunately, when the deadline arrived, we had a sufficient number around which a draft program could be shaped. Some came in after that date, requiring a bit of juggling of the program and editing of the Conference Handbook (see below), but we were not unhappy about having more abstracts!

Although some conference organisers prefer to pre-determine the concurrent streams prior to calling for abstracts, we deliberately left the categories and streams open ended so that potential presenters did not feel restricted in their choice of topics. (We did however, have some general themes in mind eg OH&S, Nursing, IT etc.) Ultimately we were very pleased with the response we received and we would recommend a similar approach to future organisers. The feedback from the 2004 conference suggests that more posters and innovation displays should be encouraged.

**12. Sponsors**

**13. Registrations**

**14. Financial administration**

**15. Program**

Before the abstract deadline, consider your preferred structure of the program and if/when to include site visits, keynote speakers, plenary sessions, special interest groups, and social activities including the conference dinner. Often the conference dinner is scheduled for the first night of proceedings (as ours was) but many people prefer the dinner to be on the second night following the conclusion of the conference (as per TechTrain 2001) when delegates can feel more relaxed. This may however disadvantage those whose travel arrangements prevent them from staying after the conference has finished.

Give considerable thought to who you would like to have as your keynote speakers – ensuring they are entertaining and that their expertise will appeal to a broad range of technical staff. Consider also if you would like to have a Patron of the conference, ours was solely a figurehead, and therefore did not impact on programming.

TechNet SA introduced a few new items to the program in 2004, including activities on the day preceding the conference (early registration, site visits and a Welcome reception), a designated poster/innovation display session, and a TechNet Australia general meeting. A significant new feature was the professional trade display featuring 18 exhibiting (paying) companies. As part of their agreement, morning/afternoon teas and lunch were to be served in the trade display area. The trade display was open to the public for set times coinciding with conference sessions and this was advertised in nearby labs and institutions.

Once the abstracts or their titles have been received, a draft program can be formatted. Look at previous TechTrain programs to get some ideas – no need to reinvent the wheel. Decide on the length of oral presentations - some feedback comments from the 2004 TechTrain indicated that people would welcome longer discussion times (but this time can drag if there is no discussion!). Consider also allocated times between presentations, which may be determined by walking times between rooms.

What seems an overwhelming task is easier when broken down. Usually there are 4 sessions and for non-plenary sessions, 4 concurrent streams. The first session on Day 1 will be taken up with the welcome, the official opening (usually by the Vice Chancellor), and a keynote speaker. After morning tea the concurrent sessions start. Group similar themed papers together, start allocating them into streams and filling in the spaces, trying to avoid obvious clashes of presentations which may appeal to the same audience (not always possible to do!) Slot in lunch and tea breaks. Consider chairpersons for each session (usually committee members) and note that they can’t chair and present at the same time! Consider the special interest groups/workshops - how many (may depend on the venue) the themes, and how long to allocate. Don’t despair if it doesn’t all come together at once – our program was changing almost daily a few weeks before the conference.

Once you have a rough idea of the format, keynote speakers and presentations, post it on the website and let people know by email. Any gaping holes in the format can be filled with plenary sessions, networking sessions, on-site site visits or demonstrations of technical work at the coalface.

**16. Conference dinner**

The dinner can make or break the conference and is often one of the most memorable parts of the program. A good venue, good food and good entertainment will go a long way to making the dinner a social and networking success. A subcommittee researched possible venues and menus. They firstly considered the location – ideally within walking distance from the Conference Venue, and secondly value for money, and found that most venues were competitive in price.

The venue selected was chosen for several reasons – firstly it was aesthetically pleasing, with a scenic view over the River Torrens to Adelaide Oval. Secondly, the hosts offered us artistic and décor control, and finally, they provided a choice of superior meal packages. The buffet option was chosen to provide delegates with choices of dishes and to cover the broadest taste range (including offering hot and cold serves). Unlike some venues it also offered a dance floor and staging for a band. The management and staff were most amenable and all our event suggestions were considered and developed with their input and we found them to be completely professional in all aspects.

The band was chosen through personal recommendation. Obviously careful consideration must be given to choosing a band – one that will suit most tastes in music, that is not too loud during dinner, that people to dance to later in the evening, and one that is not too expensive!

**17. Social Program**

As well as the dinner and the Wine & Cheese function we decided to have a Welcome reception the evening preceding the conference. The challenge was how to do this on a budget. The solution was to do it ourselves instead of having caterers, and to call on sponsors. Consequently the beer, wine and orange juice were donated as well as the dips. This cut our costs considerably and we kept the rest of the catering fairly simple. A subcommittee consisting of committee members and volunteers worked behind the scenes to organise and set up both functions.

We also had goods donated for the Wine and Cheese function including cheeses, olives, olive oil, and wine. One sponsor chose to be present to do a wine tasting of their products, but this can cause problems distinguishing between the conference drinks and those to be tasted only.

**18. Conference Handbook**

TechNet SA started collating the Conference Handbook six months before the conference. We looked at handbooks from each previous TechTrain (and other conferences) to get ideas. As well as the formalities, we wanted to include tourism information and, as the conference was a joint collaboration, information about each participating Uni. We found the use of the web very helpful for this, and sought permission from the Uni publicity departments to reproduce extracts from webpages, before going to press. We contacted the Vice Chancellors’ offices for messages of support for the handbook. These may need to come through the Publicity Office and will also need final approval before going to press, as will the use of any photographs.

It was a time consuming process, so start early. We found it best to virtually complete the rest of the booklet before the abstracts came in. Check with printers about the expected costs and decide on a format to suit your budget. We found a huge discrepancy in quotes between printers at two different Universities. Firstly though, they will need to know how many pages (hard to say without knowing the number of abstracts), if you want full colour throughout ($$$) or just on the front (and maybe back) cover, 2-colour throughout, shading, or black & white only. Then there is the formatting - any specialist graphic-design features will certainly escalate your costs as will the use of higher grade or glossy paper. Get the artistic ones on the committee to start thinking about the cover and any possible photos to be included.

Find out how much lead time the printer needs and be prepared to chase up late abstracts, stressing to authors that failure to meet the deadline may mean their abstract is omitted. The program too may change right up until the last minute. A word of warning – the booklet is best tackled by someone well experienced in word processing, managing long documents, and using graphics!

Below are the subject headings from the 2004 Conference Handbook:

Welcome

Patron

Conference Theme

Conferencing Organising Committee

About TechNet

Conference Catering

University of Adelaide

University of SA

Flinders University

Messages of Support

Keynote Speakers

Trade Exhibitors

General Information

Site Visits

Conference Programme

Abstracts

**Trade Display**

**Merchandising**

**Full Papers**

At the time of calling for abstracts, outline the deadline and format required for full papers. We initially put a 4-page limit on the length of the papers, but some authors requested more and as we decided on the CD format for the conference proceedings, we felt that the length was not really an issue. Presenters were reminded about deadlines for papers, but some preferred not to include a full paper, feeling that the inclusion of the abstract and their PowerPoint presentation on the CD of conference proceedings was sufficient. Others preferred to give delegates more details in the form of a paper, which also may be a requirement for funding for some presenters, particularly if the Conference Proceedings has an ISBN number (see below). Although it is preferable for everything to run smoothly and on time, in retrospect, failure of presenters to meet the deadlines for abstracts, papers and PowerPoint presentations really is not worth stressing about!

**Conference Proceedings**

In recent years the Conference Proceedings has been in CD format rather than hard copy and has contained abstracts, full papers and PowerPoint presentations. We requested that presenters email us a copy of their presentations about 10 days before the conference with the intention of burning them onto each of the Conference Proceedings (a time consuming process), so that the CD’s would be ready and packed into each delegate’s satchel when they registered. This would also have enabled is to loaded onto break-out room computers in readiness for the start of the conference.

This turned out to be quite impractical for several reasons. Firstly, many presentations these days are too big to email unless zipped. Secondly, some burnt copies were not compatible with our laptops, causing a mild (!!) last minute IT panic the day before the conference!! Thirdly and most importantly, most people simply do not have their talks ready that far in advance. In fact most arrived at the conference with their own copies on disc or memory stick, or had brought their own laptops. This necessitated (literally) last minute copying of presentations onto our computers both for the talks, and for our own copy to burn onto the CD.

Consequently, the conference proceedings CD was not ready at registration or for a considerable time after the conference, necessitating it be mailed out to delegates. This turned out to be advantageous in some ways, as photos from the conference could also be added. How this is best handled in future conferences is up to individual organisers.

Acquiring an ISBN number for the Conference Proceedings is a relatively simple process, and should you choose to do this (we didn’t) your Uni library will be able to give you the details

**Presenters**

Once the abstracts are finalised and the draft program set, thank the speakers for their contributions and send them a copy of the program with times and venues listed. Deal with any clashes/changes that will inevitably pop up. If perhaps you are aware of presentations for which no abstract has yet been forthcoming, it will be necessary to follow up with further emails or phonecalls to meet the deadline for publication and for finalising the program. Suggest to speakers that they watch the website for any changes to the program. Ask them to inform you of any special audiovisual requirements. Finally, remind them of the deadline for the full papers.

A couple of weeks out from the conference contact the speakers and request from them a brief introduction which the session chairperson can use. We limited ours to about 50 words, which is enough to state who they are, a brief background, what they are currently working on and what their talk is about. Also ask that they send a copy of their PowerPoint presentation (not always possible – see Conference Proceedings) and strongly recommend they bring a spare copy of their presentation on disc or USB.

For the keynote speakers, the introduction can be more extensive and may be the same as that gained from them for inclusion in the Conference Proceedings. Abstracts, but not full papers, may or may not be required of the keynote speakers.

**24. Chairpersons**

We defined the role of the session chairperson as follows:

Meet speakers prior to your session.

Introduce yourself to audience.

Give brief overview of session & speakers .

State time allocated for each talk and that this includes 5 minutes for questions.

Introduce speakers .

Keep speakers to time - ring bell if necessary when 2 mins talk time left .

At end of talk time allow 5 mins question time.

Take questions from the floor until allocated end of question time.

Have a prepared question in case no-one else has.

Give speakers a gift at end of their presentation & thank them.

At end of last talk, thank all speakers and preview following session.

State allocated time for break and start time of next session.

The interest group facilitators ran the sessions as they pleased but we suggested the following guidelines:

Introduce yourself.

Go around the room and get people to introduce themselves (depending on numbers).

Give brief overview of why we’re doing this and how session will be run.

Can use paper and a pen in folders.

Give them 5 minutes or so to write down any issues they can think of that need attention so that they can get their get their jobs done better.

Invite people to share their thoughts with the group.

Say we’re not here to solve problems but to suggest solutions.

Put a networking slant on discussion – i.e. how communication and networking can help these issues.

Have some ideas up your sleeve in case no one contributes!

Nominate a spokesperson to summarise the group discussion at the closing session

Keep to time

**Volunteers**

With a small organising committee, we realized early on that we would need help leading up to and during the conference. We called for volunteers from outside the committee and those you responded were given some options about jobs they may want to do. We offered to supply volunteers with a complimentary conference polo shirt as worn by the committee.

Help was required in the preceding week(s) with things like labels and conference satchels. During the conference, we needed people on the registration desk and help with setting up the Welcome and Wine & Cheese functions. We also needed IT help to pre-load presentations onto the laptops and deal with other technical problems, and generally extra-pairs of hands for setting up and taking down, and bus drivers and guides required for site visits.

We decided that it was best to collate a roster, so that everyone was clear about what they were doing and when. This worked quite well, especially for the registration desk. The volunteers were invaluable during the conference and freed up committee members to do other roles. Following the conference we sent the volunteers a printed certificate of thanks.

**Final Details**

As the conference became closer we realized that monthly 1½ hour meetings were just not long enough. Meetings soon became fortnightly then weekly. One meeting we held at the venue with the coordinator, another we held at the dinner venue with the host. These were most valuable in sorting out fine details. At about 4-6 weeks out we decided to have a half-day session at someone’s home. We brainstormed and made checklists and tried to sort out final details.

In the final weeks on and off campus site visits were finalised, as were details about the social functions and there were hassles to be sorted out with the trade exhibitors due to communication problems with the company setting up the exhibit area.

The merchandise began to arrive and was collated. Other businesses were contacted and in kind sponsorship arranged. The registrations kept flowing in well after the early bird deadline and name tags, labels, lanyards, etc all had to be prepared as well as dealing with the endless flow of associated financials. The handbook had to be finished, and approved by the media offices, the cover designed, then sent off to the printer. Presenters and key note speakers were contacted, VC’s were confirmed, signs were made, greenery hired, University banners collected, photographer organised, evaluation forms, certificates of attendance and quizzes printed, rosters and information sheets prepared for committee and volunteers, computers picked up, security organised, speaker’s gifts wrapped, tourist information collected and satchels filled. We were ready to roll!!

**27. The Conference Begins!**

Activities for the 2004 TechTrain conference actually began the day before the official program commenced. The morning of Wednesday 30 June 2004 was spent at the venue setting up poster boards and displays, overseeing deliveries, putting last minute inserts into satchels, separating and laminating badges, assembling lanyards, and checking rooms and AV equipment and sorting out IT problems. Each committee member was given a folder with contact phone numbers and useful information about the venue, a copy of the program and when they were chairing, introductions to presenters in their sessions, rosters for the registration desk and note paper.

Early registration began at about midday and soon after the buses arrived for the off-site site visits. For each break-out room, and lecture theatre, a list of talks was prepared and those for which PowerPoint presentations were available were loaded onto the designated computers. Security for valuables and laptops was arranged. The Welcome function was set up during the afternoon and was underway by 4.30 pm.

By 9.00 am the next morning, speaker’s gifts were in place, registrations were well underway, and soon after, the conference formalities officially began. And the rest as they say, is history.

**28. In Hindsight ……..**

In hindsight there were a few things we probably would have done differently and a few suggestions from the feedback sheets that could be taken on board.

Firstly, check and double check. Things you thought had been checked, check again – some things slipped through the cracks for us even though we thought everything had been covered. It’s the little details that can make a difference to the smooth running of the event.

Even though it’s been done a thousand times before, go through the program, the list of presenters, chairpersons, keynote speakers, VC’s - just once more before the event. Make sure everyone is aware of when and where they are supposed to be.

Avoid confusion by not having a ‘wine tasting’ (with the little tasting glasses) with the normal drinks at the Wine and Cheese Function.

In an ideal world everything would be ready before the delegates arrived. But this is not always possible or practical. As delegates register, have a list of presenters at the registration desk and as they arrive ask them if they have provided a copy of their PowerPoint presentation and introduction. If not, direct them to the IT person and their session chairperson. For catering purposes, double check if they are coming to the conference dinner.

At the registration desk, or nearby, have access to a computer, printer, photocopier and laminator, and arrangements for latecomers to pay upfront.

In the initial stages when calling for abstracts, encourage more posters and innovation displays, or on-site talks/demonstrations.

Provide a balance between one overall feedback form for *all* presentations, and one for *each* presentation - perhaps one at the end of each session.

It was suggested that a prize(s) could be awarded for the best first-time presenter. May be difficult to arrange with voting and ensuring people know who qualifies. Another option is an all round prize for overall best/most entertaining/most innovative session to be voted by delegates.

Use clip-on microphones for each presenter. Have a roving microphone available for interactive sessions, especially in the lecture theatre.

If the Conference Proceedings CD can’t be ready at registration (and most probably it won’t) and if the budget will allow, outsource the burning of the CDs. It’s very time consuming and it’s far better to get it done and mailed out ASAP after the event.

Ideally have a facility available for delegates to be able to check their email.

Ensure your sponsors and invited guests are provided for with things like free car parking.

After the conference is over and you have survived, it’s easy just to close the book and walk away, but there are still things to be followed up on. Schedule a meeting soon after the event for a debriefing and to organise acknowledgements to sponsors, helpers etc.

Don’t stress!