Sustainability. It is not only about the planet, IT IS ALSO ABOUT THE PEOPLE

For all the talk about saving the planet it is difficult to find tangible examples of changing the way in which meetings are managed to comply with sustainable practice. It is such an exciting journey to work with those clients who seriously want to approach the planning of their conference to embrace a strategy to cover off as many aspects of sustainable management as can reasonably be incorporated.

With over 1,000 delegates attending the conference, there were plenty of opportunities to network and share ideas about what works in improving student learning. When delegates travelled back to their school communities, it is expected Students for Futures will have made a strategic impact on student, teacher and school community practice.

With school planning underway, visitors to the website were encouraged to access the conference proceedings as a valuable resource in the development of their school plans.

From the onset of the conference planning, the Organising Committee (OC) made a conscious effort to be ‘green’ and innovative.

What made this particular conference worth signing up for is that it had a track record of good but routine objectives and the Organising Committee undertook to make some radical changes to produce a sustainable event without lacking any of the shine it takes to achieve success.

The 5th Biennial Equity Conference was held at the Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre on 22 and 23 August 2013. With a theme of Schooling for Futures, the conference broke away from conventional concepts and brought together delegates from schools, regional and state offices, universities and community agencies in a positive learning environment. A much sought after and highly respected speaker, Her Excellency, Professor Marie Bashir AC, CVO, the Governor of NSW provided the opening address. Keynote presentations were delivered by overseas speakers Professor Bob Limperis and Sir Ken Robinson. Delegates were able to select from eight invited speakers, 70 workshops and 17 exhibitions and trade displays.

The conference major sponsor Adobe generously provided a Creative Suite S5 Reader Collection. This was a major prize in a schools competition. Teachers and community members will be able to use Photoshop and Illustrator along with other software applications to engage students in their learning in new and creative ways.

The outcome was that the 5th Biennial Equity Conference was a great example of a sustainable meeting that brought together the combined efforts of the conference committee, the PCCO and all suppliers. A sustainable conference such as this is testament to a well-planned objective of intentionally reducing carbon footprints and wastage of resources such as water and paper. It is also a credit to those who came up with inclusive activities that used technology to involve a greater audience and expand the impact and value of the event on much greater numbers than those in the centre.

SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

From the onset of the conference planning, the Organising Committee (OC) made a conscious effort to be ‘green’ and innovative. Adobe provided all materials for the conference in a digital format, and the OC appointed the PCCO to develop and implement the following some of which may appeal normal to some readers but required a brave step forward to change past habits.

1. The majority of conference materials was conducted electronically, through email marketing campaigns and the conference website, with a large array of downloadable information. This was a significant change from the previous conference, where most of the marketing collateral were hard-copy.
2. Rather than a large programme book, smaller ‘tablet’ pocket-sized programmes were used.
3. Smaller conference collateral were entered to save material and storage space.
4. All abstracts provided to delegates on a USB stick rather than a hard-copy abstract book.
5. Online, attendees were set up throughout the venue and in pre-conference communications, delegates were encouraged to bring their own water bottles for refills.
6. Lunches, after much negotiation to overcome occupational health and safety issues, were trays of healthy sandwiches and salads which were served in biodegradable plates and cutlery, crockery and napkins.
7. No pens and pens were provided during the conference, and delegates were encouraged to bring their own.
8. Name badges were returned on the Christmas tree like structure that adorned the delegates and inspired them to place their name badge with the rest.
9. On day 1, Sir Ken Robinson hosted live from LA to discuss the importance of providing a creative and personalized education for all students.
10. Without doubt the most impressive activity was a simulation from schools throughout the state. Students were given a choice of role and other performance opportunities to learn to value their performances at the same time as that performed centre stage at the convention centre. By doing this the conference incorporated hundreds of students in a simulation via YouTube and engaged them actively in the conference without the loss of their time away from school. Travel costs and carbon impact. It was ‘awesome’ and ‘cool’ and lifted the spirit of the whole conference to be able to share with so many fellow students, teachers and administrators across the state.

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