Description

Location

Just as in real estate, where the conference is being held can carry more weight than the content being presented:

- Too exotic could be tough to get approved—Bora Bora, really?
- A location with too many local attractions could indicate weak content as organizers count on the distractions to make up for a limited agenda.

Shorter is Better

Annual academic conferences in particular face the challenge of having so many potential presenters that the event can go on for several days:

- International conferences may be longer to justify the extended travel time
- Content can be easily managed through parallel tracks with post-conference availability of presentation materials for missed sessions.
- Short session times should indicate focused presentations
- General sessions should be plenary and keynote only

Proficient Use of Technology

With parallel tracks, delegates will be unable to attend every session. A good academic conference manages technology to facilitate both top quality presentations and ease of availability of papers, PowerPoint presentations, etc. Proficient organizers should be able to make all the materials available at check-in or, in the face of some unorganized presenters, shortly after the conference ends.

Look for Danger Signs of Information Overload

If every lunch and/or dinner is sponsored with an obligatory presentation or “working session,” that’s a sign that the conference organizers have opted for quantity over quality:

- Papers and presentations are usually taken home and read later, unless a delegate has specific questions for a presenter.
- Delegates are there to meet people and exchange ideas, not to be crammed for the maximum number of presentations.
- A good conference offers lots of networking opportunities. Even in this world of web-conferencing technology and the ubiquitous availability of Skype, productive collaboration can still depend on face-to-face interaction.

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Remember What You're Looking to Achieve at the Event

The best conferences never lose sight of the fact that it's all about the delegates. If you have clear objectives to be achieved, and you sought budgetary approval to attend the academic conference on the basis of those objectives, don't compromise:

- Staying current in your field—if you're area of research is fairly dynamic, look for the cutting-edge sessions from field leaders.
- Networking with colleagues—collaborative sessions rather than "sage on the stage" presentations would be helpful here. If those aren't available, make sure there are enough offline opportunities for informal meetings.
- Find potential research collaborators—have your target list prepared in advance. Conference organizers aren't always willing to share delegate lists in advance, but if the right topics and presenters are on the agenda, it's likely that at least some of your list will be there.
- Find potential funding partners—conferences are either hosted or underwritten for visibility. Look for the hospitality suites or hosted lunches and dinners to see who's there to write some checks.

If you don't find an academic conference that meets your needs, consider waiting until next year. Not wasting the budget dollars can work to your advantage, and at least your inbox won't fill-up while you're killing time at a second-rate conference. Just be careful that non-attendance this year doesn't lead to a presumption of non-attendance next year.

Category

1. Promoting Research
2. Using Online Media

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