Growth Through Engagement and Teamwork

Conferences Breakout Session Outbrief

January 28 & 29, 2021

Virtual Officers Meeting

Overall Consensus:

There is 'violent agreement' that we must go back to traditional in-person conferences in the long run

But in the short and medium term ...

Near-Term: Virtual conferences

- Generally two models:
  - Live sessions: more expensive
  - Recorded presentations: less interaction
- Pre-recorded, on-demand content appears to be the most popular
- Virtual allows a larger number of world-renowned experts to participate in panel discussions due to low time commitment
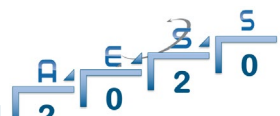- Industry sponsorship will be significantly lower; they see little ROI

Medium-Term:
Hybrid conferences

- IEEE is pushing for these

- Hard to plan for; difficult to know how many in-person attendees there will be and thus how much venue space is needed; venues are playing hard ball and are unwilling to be flexible

- Hybrid conferences add work and stress to the organizers; you're essentially organizing two simultaneous conferences

- Live streaming is expensive and the quality is generally low

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Medium-Term: Hybrid (cont'd)

- One model is to pre-record the presentations for the individual/break-out sessions and make them available on-demand; only live-stream the major keynote presentations and panel discussions

- ACTION: Solicit AESS support for the additional costs associated with the on-line component of the conference (e.g., for 2022 Aero, Radar, MetroAeroSpace)
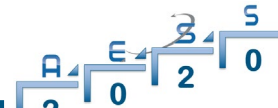
Additional Thoughts/Comments: Virtual/Hybrid/In-Person

- Human interaction (whether for networking or other reasons) is a major component of a successful conference
  - This is particularly true for students and young professionals
  - Student participation in virtual conferences appears to be low
- Currently brainstorming ways to add value for students/YPs; perhaps some live on-line event in conjunction with a given conference

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Additional Thoughts/Comments: Virtual/Hybrid/In-Person

- Need to consider how the Conference Committee can interface with Education, Industry Relations and Tech Ops to assist and promote AESS

- Membership: promotion at the conferences

- Education: e.g., tutorials and short-courses held in conjunction with the conferences

- Industry Relations: e.g., panel discussions (Mike Noble already has this in progress)

- Tech Ops: promote tech panels

Additional Thoughts/Comments: Virtual/Hybrid/In-Person (cont'd)

- Some academics will participate, no matter what, simply to ensure they get a paper published

- Companies are determining that working from home is not reducing productivity and some are likely to limit employee participation in conferences to on-line only (to save travel costs)

- If too many attendees stay home, though, it may 'take the life out of' the in-person component of the conference

Wrap-Up:
How to Move Forward

- We lack sufficient data to make good decisions
  - What value do attendees place on on-line conference content?
  - Pre-recorded or live technical presentations? Pre-recorded or live plenary speakers? Panel discussions?
- ACTION: Conference committee to work with MCE to generate a survey to go out to all AESS members

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Wrap-Up:
Oh, And One More Thing…

- The quality of the website used to provide the on-line content for a conference has a major impact
  - Easy-to-navigate websites make the experience pleasant
  - Poorly-designed websites make the experience such that the attendee may never come back
- A standard, high-quality, website model could alleviate the problems but a given conference may not want to use it

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