

# How technology can help you to survive a meeting

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I'm currently in Chicago at the annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO). This is a large meeting on clinical cancer research with about 30.000 people attending. Rather than writing about the specific research presented and discussed at the meeting, I would like to talk about how (web) technology can help in having a better conference. I will focus on two (obvious) issues:

- How do I find the relevant information out of thousands of abstracts and sessions?
- How can I benefit from the meeting even if not physically present?

ASCO has done a number of things to help. All meeting abstracts were made available a few weeks before the meeting. The meeting program is available online, and you can create your personal schedule that you can print out or export to your calendar software. The schedule is also available for Palm users. At the meeting, you find free WiFi throughout the conference. Most talks are made available as videocasts (for a fee now, made publicly available October 1) or podcasts. ASCO also even has an educational session with three talks titled Using the Internet to Keep Current: From Podcasts to Virtual Meetings to RSS.

Information about the meeting is difficult to find. With the exception of blogs and websites that cover the meeting from a business perspective – results from clinical trials presented at the meeting can have a profound impact on the stock performance – there isn't a lot of blogging about the meeting (as discussed here before). This means that the filtering out of the interesting information still has to be done the traditional way, basically going through the 5000+ abstracts.

Conclusion: The meeting organizers provide a number of wonderful tools, but they haven't yet discovered Web 2.0. More blogging or online discussion would make the meeting much more interesting. And the function to create a personal schedule could be greatly enhanced by using user input, e.g. listing the most popular talks or allowing you to share your schedule with a colleague. You can get a lot out of the meeting even if you are not physically present, but the information filtering has still a way to go.