

It's time for Conference 2.0

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***Conference 2.0** – A scheduled meeting of people sharing a common interest that takes advantage of Web 2.0¹ concepts.*

Scientific conferences are essential both for the exchange of ideas and for networking. But they don't have to be organized the same way as 10-20 years ago. Web 2.0 tools now allow much broader user participation before, during and after the conference. Technology conferences have seen this change already². We also already have open source software to organize conferences³. I've collected a few of those ideas and concepts below.

1. Keep the conference small

Active user participation works better in smaller conferences, e.g. not more than maybe 150 participants (derived from Dunbar's number⁴ introduced by **Duncan Hull**). This will exclude large or very large conferences – the largest scientific conferences today have more than 10.000 participants. But those larger conferences can still adopt some of the principles discussed below.

2. Allow for user input to the conference program

Even though most scientific conferences ask for abstract submissions well before the conference, the conference schedule is ultimately decided by a small program committee. But conference organizers could well ask for user input about session topics. In the BarCamp or unconference format, the conference program is even decided on the first day of the conference⁵.

3. Provide free WiFi

This is essential for liveblogging about the conference. And free WiFi in combination with a good conference website with detailed schedule, message boards and practical information would greatly reduce the amount of printed material that needs to be handed out at the conference.

4. Set aside time for networking

There should be enough time (and space) between sessions to talk to the other conference participants. After all, this is one main reason for many people to attend a conference. And the conference organizers can facilitate networking in other ways. Poster sessions (see below) are one way, a very short introduction by every participant (either in person or on the conference website) is another idea.

5. Pay attention to poster sessions and discussions

Conferences can have other session formats than oral presentations. Poster sessions are an often neglected part of many conferences. But they are a great tool for networking, especially with younger scientists. The conference organizers should set aside enough time and avoid parallel oral sessions. Providing drinks and food also helps. Round-table discussions are another underused format with a lot of potential.

6. Encourage blogging

There should be a clear policy regarding blogging stated at the conference website. And this policy should make it easy for conference participants to blog. This means no preregistration and no required affiliation with a news service or journal. Conference organizers should provide a tag for the conference so that blog entries can be tracked.

*Blogging about the conference is encouraged by the conference organizers. Please use the tag *conferencename* for all your blog posts. Please don't blog about sessions marked **non_public** in the conference program. They contain information that should not become public at this time, e.g. because they discuss unpublished results. For further questions regarding blogging at the conference, please contact ... _*

There are many different ways to blog about a conference, microblogging via FriendFeed is currently a very popular option⁶.

7. Produce podcasts

Podcasts with audio and video of the slides are a great way to capture oral sessions at a conference. They are especially valuable for those unable to attend. This week's **Science in the 21st Century** conference is a good example of how this can be done⁷.

8. Organize parallel local conferences

The costs and annoyances of traveling, combined with concerns about the carbon footprint⁸ have led to new concepts. Instead of following the conference from the distance via live-streaming or live-blogging, why not organize several parallel local conferences⁹? The Singularity web conference next month is using this concept¹⁰. Will the next science blogging conference happen in parallel in several locations?

¹ **What is Web 2.0**

² **Welcome to Conference 2.0**

³ **Open Conference Systems**

⁴ **Dunbar's number**

⁵ **In which I am utterly Fooed**

⁶ **Micro-Blogging Conference Talks**

⁷ **Perimeter Institute Recorded Seminar Archive**

⁸ **Carbon Footprint**

⁹ **Building Conference 2.0**

¹⁰ **Head – the global web conference**