

Meetings and Their Publications*

EILEEN F. DIRKSEN

Technical Information Division, Esso Research and Engineering Company,
Linden, New Jersey

Received March 11, 1964

Next to personal contacts, meetings offer perhaps the most direct means of alerting the chemist to new developments. However, because we are all so familiar with meetings, and their publications, we tend to take them for granted.

Perhaps it would be well, here, to begin with a fresh look at some of these meeting publications from a current-awareness viewpoint.

Premeeting Publications. *Announcements of meetings* vary in their form and manner of distribution. Dates are often fixed one, two, or even more years in advance, in order to secure suitable hotel and exhibit space. Some organizations have their meeting dates set by a formula in their by-laws; other dates are chosen to coincide with outside events, such as breaks in the academic year, national holidays, and so forth. Whatever the reason for the date chosen, the formal announcement of the meeting is usually made far enough in advance—at least two or three months—to enable those wishing to attend to arrange their personal schedules.

The minimum information to be contained in a meeting announcement can be outlined as "What, When, and Where": the name or subject of the meeting, the date, and the location of the meeting. More information is desirable, of course, so many announcements contain hourly time schedules and information on housing, transportation, and recreation, becoming, in fact, programs as well as announcements.

The most obvious means of distributing the announcement of a meeting is by direct mail to all the individuals and groups concerned. Often, this mailing is supplemented by having the announcement printed in the official publication of the organization sponsoring the meeting, and also in other technical journals covering the field(s) involved. This ensures not only membership awareness, but also reaches nonmembers who may be interested in the subject area.

Because of the large number of meetings, and the large number of people interested in learning about pertinent ones, several meeting-listing services are now available. These range in cost from \$4 to \$25 per year and cover national and international meetings up to five years in advance. *Scientific Meetings*, published three times a year by the Special Libraries Association, in addition to listing future meetings and their dates, indicates for many of the sponsoring organizations the nature and availability of meeting publications. The quarterly Technical Meeting Index Service, New Hartford, N. Y., provides similar information in the *Technical Meeting Index Quarterly*. Most technical journals also include a list of future meetings at least once a year; *Chemical and Engineering*

News publishes in February and July an extensive list of meetings of interest to chemists.

As an example of private services that can be provided, Esso Research and Engineering Company issues an annual Calendar of Meetings which includes notations on 30 or more technical meetings which might be of interest to Company personnel. In addition, the Technical Library maintains a file of current meeting announcements and programs. As these are received, they are circulated to the various information specialists in the Technical Information Divisions, depending upon subject matter, who in turn advise the members of the technical divisions concerned. This ensures coverage, if desired, at possibly important but not well-publicized meetings.

Meeting programs vary in the amount of detail provided. They are often an integral part of the meeting announcement, as indicated above (e.g., the complex of housing, social, and technical information provided by the American Chemical Society in *Chemical and Engineering News*), and are available well in advance of the meeting. In addition, most groups provide a complete, detailed program at the meeting itself, showing time schedules, authors' names, etc. A program as detailed as that of the American Chemical Society or the American Institute of Chemical Engineers is a valuable source of current information. It can show trends in subject interest and individual authors and organizations active in a given field.

Preprints are probably the most useful meeting publication from the current-awareness aspect. Many large groups issue preprints of meeting papers; for example, five ACS divisions, the Society of Automotive Engineers, and the American Petroleum Institute, either as individually available papers or in bound volumes.

An excellent survey of the pros and cons of preprints from the ACS point of view was presented in a symposium before the Division of Chemical Literature in September 1962 (1). Problems include costs, preparation time, and quality (including lack of reviewing). Regardless of drawbacks, however, the preprint is a prime current-awareness tool, because of its quick availability.

Abstracts of papers distributed just before or at various meetings are similar in their uses to preprints. They are less complete, of course, but they are more widely available because they are easier and cheaper to publish. The American Chemical Society, the American Institute of Chemical Engineers, and certain other technical societies publish premeeting abstracts to tell prospective attendees what they may expect to hear and to enable those not in attendance to gain at least a brief review of the meeting.

Both preprints and abstracts of papers are usually available at the meeting, and may also be routinely mailed to members. In addition, many societies conduct

* Presented before the Division of Chemical Literature, 148th National Meeting of the American Chemical Society, Chicago, Ill., Aug. 31, 1964.

a mail-order service for these items. For example, the Society of Automotive Engineers and the American Society for Testing and Materials charge \$0.75 per paper for preprints, and the American Petroleum Institute charges \$1.00 per copy.

Possible results of issuing a *premeeting* proceedings volume for the annual convention of the American Psychological Association are considered by Garvey and Griffith in their study of the scientist's information-exchange behavior relative to presentations at large conventions (2).

Meeting Sessions. The meeting itself, at which the man stands before his colleagues and tells them what is new and important in his work, is, of course, the peak of current awareness. Aided by slides, charts, and a blackboard for last-minute data, the author brings out for the audience the significant facts of his presentation, in order to stimulate discussions (3-5).

The discussion period after the presentation is regarded by many as the most important part of the meeting. Indeed, it is regarded as so important that in some cases actual presentation at the meeting has been eliminated entirely. Preprints of presentations are distributed well in advance of the meeting, and the author's role becomes that of a discussion leader presiding over questions and answers from the previously briefed attendees. At other meetings, discussion panels review and comment on the preprints, followed by "author forums" at which attendees interested in details can query the authors more completely.

This emphasis on critical review and discussion from the floor raises the problem of making the resultant vital information available to those not present at the meeting sessions. The answer is, of course, some form of recording at the meeting, followed by issuance of proceedings. However, there is occasionally some objection to this on both legal and professional grounds. Such groups as the Gordon Research Conferences will not permit any part of the presentation or discussion to be quoted or reproduced for publication without express permission of the author. The SAE, on the other hand, solicits and prints prepared discussions of papers presented at its national meetings. Baum gives an interesting discussion of several of these meeting formats, and their advantages and disadvantages, from the point of view of the documentalist (6).

Post-Meeting Publications. Proceedings are the most common type of organized post-meeting publication, especially where the society does not publish many meeting papers in its journal(s). Major technical societies have issued proceedings for their meetings for many years, and these then become a permanent part of the literature in their subject areas. The current-awareness value of proceedings volumes, however, is governed by the promptness with which they are made available. The time lag between the meeting and publication is, all too often, a year or more, greater than that required for publication in some of the scholarly journals.

Of more use from the current-awareness point of view are the reviews of meetings, usually with abstracts or synopses of papers, that are published in various journals such as *Chemical and Engineering News* for the ACS, *Rubber Age* for the ACS Rubber Division, *Mechanical Engineering* for the ASME, and the *Oil and Gas Journal* for the API, SAE, and other societies of interest to the petroleum industry. While these reviews may not be complete—the editors usually select only the more newsworthy papers for review—they are available soon after the meeting and serve at least to alert those interested to the fact that papers pertinent to their work were presented and discussed.

CONCLUSIONS

It would appear, then, that the current-awareness value of meeting publications—and, indeed, of the meeting itself—depends on three factors: timing, completeness, and availability.

Announcements, programs, and preprints or abstracts of papers should be made available as far in advance of the meeting as possible, and should be as widely distributed as is consistent with the general policy of the organization sponsoring the meeting. These publications should contain sufficient information to enable the reader to determine whether he will benefit by attending the meeting. If it is not possible for him to attend, he should at least be able to determine the general trend of subjects covered at the meeting and to follow up in other ways.

The effectiveness of the meeting itself is often due in large part to the activities of the chairman or moderator in aiding authors in their presentations and in controlling the all-important discussion periods. He must encourage both authors and audience to introduce new information and to avoid repetition of well-known details.

Proceedings and post-meeting reviews should be published as promptly as possible after the meeting, with care on the part of the editors preparing meeting reviews for journals to avoid missing papers of interest.

Observance of these criteria can enhance the current-awareness values of both meetings and their publications.

LITERATURE CITED

- (1) Symposium on ACS Divisional Preprints—Purpose, Production and Costs, and Place in the Chemical Literature, *J. Chem. Doc.*, **3**, 63-79 (1963).
- (2) Garvey, W. D., Griffith, B. C., *A.D.I. Proceedings*, **1**, 201 (1964).
- (3) Jones, B. A., *J. Chem. Doc.*, **4**, 131 (1964).
- (4) Wolstenholme, G. E. W., *Science*, **145**, 1337 (1964).
- (5) Heilprin, L. B., *A. D. I. Newsletter*, **3** (2), 1 (1964).
- (6) Baum, H., *A. D. I. Proceedings*, **1**, 243 (1964).