

Posters Platform Presentations Pages & Pages of Publications

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1992 was certainly a banner year for microscopy in terms of an incredible total of nearly 3000 presentations given world-wide - at the largest ever joint (E)MSA/MAS/MSC meeting in Boston and at the 3 IFSEM-sanctioned Regional Conferences in Spain, China and Venezuela. Several of the local affiliate societies also mounted well-attended symposia and contributed to the outpouring of words and images. The apparently continuously growing volume of microscopy-related presentations has impacted both conference organizers and publishers.

Poster presentations are being used to an increasing extent to avoid an excessive number of parallel sessions. There is also an economic incentive as a poster session probably costs the organizers less than half that of a platform session of contributed papers. The poster trend draws a mixed response. Most microscopists love to look at posters but hate to prepare them as they are much more work to put together and are costly. They are awkward to carry and often have a one-time use whereas slides are for ever. Posters comprise a parallel presentation with everything on display at once. The viewers have the upper hand. They can walk on by, scan the conclusions or study every fact and flaw to their hearts content.

Platform papers are serial presentations with the speaker very much in charge who can tantalize the audience waiting for a punch line until the bell rings. For many years posters were considered second class presentations with ribbons used freely to stimulate interest. Happily now the value of posters is well accepted and the best receive significant tangible recognition such as the Cecil Hall Award. Still there are no "invited posters".

The cost of publishing conference Proceedings as extended illus-

trated abstracts is now a major factor in setting registration fees for conferences and their value is under heated consideration by meeting organizers world-wide. The positive view is that they provide a permanent record of the meeting and an indication of what work is going on where. Many proceedings abstracts demonstrate that a well-written mini-paper can cover the experimental methods and important results of the work surprisingly well. In principle, this purpose of publishing conference abstracts is of value to many microscopists that didn't attend the meeting but there is little evidence that they obtain or read the Proceedings in great numbers. The negative view is that the abstracts are too brief, too expensive and too heavy and a major pain to the cadre of very popular speakers who must write one every few weeks.

Bigger meetings with more papers, and more pages to print, add significantly to registration costs. In the case of (E)MSA, the 1992 Proceedings is about 3 times larger than 10 years ago and multiple volumes are required to accommodate all of the papers. One approach is to include one volume with registration and charge for additional volumes. An extension of this solution would be to charge for all Proceedings and would surely result in fewer sales and even higher costs for the volumes that are sold. The Materials Research Society is experimenting with a throwaway newsprint edition of abstracts along with hard bound symposium volumes. (An experiment in electronic publishing by a consortium of journals will be discussed in a later commentary).

Some of the many presentations do wind up in journals as edited proceedings of topical symposia and established journals are revamping their format or publication schedules to accommodate authors and organizers. Several new international journals also appeared in 1992 including *Microbeam Analysis*, the official journal of the Microbeam Analysis Society and *Acta Microscopia* published by the Venezuelan EM Society. The (E)MAS also put out a special commemorative volume for their 50th Anniversary meeting under the banner *Microscopy - The Key Research Tool* and has increased the frequency of publication of the *Bulletin* to accommodate more scientific papers.

So - microscopists please note that the deadline for submission of abstracts for the meeting of your choice is fast approaching. ■

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