Conference Organizer Newsletter

June 2010

Inside This Issue

Correction:

In the April 2010 edition of the C O Newsletter we promised to include an article on *E-Notices: Best Practices* in this edition. Instead the article will appear in a later edition.

Protecting Your Hotel Room Rate

The current economic downturn has made hotels work harder to fill their available inventory. As a result it is even more common than ever before for a hotel to offer discounted rooms through third-party online reservation sites such as Expedia, Hotels.com, and Travelocity. Often these discounted rates are lower than those a conference group may have in contracts. Booking through these sites, at discounted rates, means the room is not counted by the Hotel in fulfillment of the contract. If enough rooms go unbooked at the conference rate then a penalty results. The catch-22 is that penalties inevitably cause registration rates to rise. The one reliable way to prevent this problem is a thoughtful contract negotiation.

How can you protect your hotel room rate in your contract?

Set the room rate in the contract. Do **not** accept a contract that quotes the rate as based upon $###.00 with a projected annual increase of 2 – 5%.

Include a "Rate Protection Clause". For example, "Hotel guarantees that no lower rates shall be offered to other groups or to individuals, whether directly or through any third party, for any days of the IEEE event, unless made applicable to all IEEE attendees." So if the published rate during the meeting dates dips below IEEE's rate, IEEE's rate decreases to that same published rate.

In some cases, the clause further states that the negotiated discount will remain intact. So if the published rate drops 10 percent, IEEE's rate will decrease 10 percent below the new published rate. It is not common for a hotel to agree to this second part.

Make sure that the "Attrition Clause" has terms that give credit to the conference for attendees who book rooms outside the block. This is done with a clause in the contract that assures that all rooms that are utilized in a hotel because of the conference should be credited towards the group's pickup, regardless of the rate. The hotel would not have sold these rooms if it were not for the conference. A clause should be included in the contract that gives credit for rooms that are miscoded or picked up outside the block, and these rooms can be identified by comparing the hotel in-house guest list with the conference registration lists.

What can you do when you learn that the hotel is offering a special rate lower than your conference rate over the same dates? What should you do to protect your group rate?

Make sure that lower rates are being offered and honored within your block as well. One strategy that can be used to ensure that the rate protections clause is being honored is to call the hotel reservation department anonymously prior to sending out marketing materials for the conference. Ask to make a reservation over the dates of the conference and request the lowest available single/double rate and availability of the special rates like those offered for AAA members.

Calls should be made every three or four weeks thereafter or upon notification of lower rates by one of the conference attendees. If it is discovered that a lower rate is being offered, address the situation with the hotel sales person. If you do not get a satisfactory response from the hotel sales person contact me. I will contact the appropriate national or global IEEE Sales Representative and help you to negotiate with the hotel. If the lower rates are available, the hotel should be asked to either close out the rate over the conference dates or offer it to the entire group.

- Lisa Schwarzbek, Manager Conference Services, l.schwarzbek@ieee.org

Conference Organizing in SPS

In the early 1990s, the leadership of the Signal Processing Society considered ways to assist volunteers who were organizing the Society's flagship conference, ICASSP (The IEEE International Conference on Acoustics, Speech, and Signal Processing); it decided to start a staff office (this office was established in 1993) albeit with an expanded mandate. Who knew, at that time, that ICASSP would double in size and that the Society would add to its conference activities ICIP (the IEEE International Conference on Image Processing held for the first time in 1994), ICME (the joint IEEE International Conference on Multimedia first held in 2000), and ISBI (the joint IEEE International Symposium on Biomedical Imaging inaugurated in 2002). At the same time a host of workshops, created and managed by the Society's technical committees, also were coming on the scene. Increase in the numbers of technical committees resulted in a growing number of workshops. In just the past few years, workshops have been added on information forensics and security; genomic signal processing; spoken language technology; advances in wireless communications, etc. Finally, the Society has selectively chosen to technically co-sponsor a number of workshops by other IEEE Societies/Councils or by other, non-IEEE organizations. These cover a broad technical landscape from smart grid to biometrics to phased array systems and beyond.

The "machine" that runs conferences and workshops is heavily fueled by volunteer effort and energy. The myriad of detail involved in running a small event is nearly the same as for a large one. Though the staff of the Society's executive office dedicated to conference services now numbers three, and the volunteer organizers are supported by excellent independent contractors, the business part of creating and mounting conferences has become significantly more complicated and the laws that govern organizations and their businesses have become more demanding of detail. Add to this the fact that the conference landscape is now crowded with competitors of various levels of quality and you get some idea as to why working on conferences and workshops may not be as much fun as it was in the halcyon days when SPS was concerned about supporting the future of ICASSP.

The IEEE Signal Processing Society is one of the largest conference givers in all of IEEE. Its events are of high quality, are generally well attended, and are certainly well regarded by the audiences that attend them. The conference "business" now provides the majority of the support for the Society's member activities, products, and services. It has an important role in the health and ongoing success of the Society in representing and serving the signal processing community-at-large. Unfortunately, it is a business that is, in many ways, relying on outdated "tools". This lack of up-to-date assistance in an increasingly complicated technical and business environment frustrates the efforts of the volunteers who run the conferences. It also makes success in conference-giving as a Society "business" more than a bit of a guessing game.

Thus, the Society's Conference Board, Executive Committee, and Board of Governors adopted a series of motions to enable the creation of a toolkit for conferences we call COS (Conference Organizers Solutions). The Society signed, a few days ago, a contract with The Active Network, Ltd., for a web-based package to assist volunteer organizers, managers, independent contractors and staff. COS is currently undergoing custom configuration to make it easy to use and to do a number of jobs that have not been possible because of a lack of sophistication of tools available for in some areas of our organizing activities. When customization is complete, tested, tested again, and training held and completed, it will be phased in over time (contracts in place for future events will continue as written; events contracted after the availability of COS will use the new toolkit).

We have great expectations for COS, not only from the standpoint of the help it will provide conference organizers and contractors with building budgets, maintaining financial records, facilitating registration, preparing for audit, and closing the books timely, but also doing tasks like capturing attendee profiles for future advertising and marketing, as well as helping the Society determine from those profiles if it is appropriate to add new events in technical areas identified by the interests of individuals who attend Society conferences, symposia, and workshops. COS is robust enough for us to consider and to add tools as the business of conferences in the Society advances. We are hopeful that its ease of use in fulfilling some of the financial and legal obligations of conference management will once again bring back much of the joy and enthusiasm our volunteers have experienced in preparing these programs for the Society's members.

- Mercy Kowalczyk, SPS Executive Director, mercy@ieee.org

Introducing: Conference Organizer Solutions

COS is a collection of three web-based tools for conference organizers to use when planning an SPS conference. The first tool is the **COS – Accounting Tool**. This is a financial management tool that is compatible with other COS tools. It is a simple accounting program that volunteers can and should use to manage their conference financials. This tool is based on the Enterprise QuickBooks® software that has been customized with the SPS budget template and account codes.

The second tool is the **COS – Event Management Tool**. This tool includes several modules allowing conference organizers have direct access and control. One of the unique features of the Event Management Tools is the user profile component. Each user will create his or her user profile. This feature will allow users to manage all of their roles for SPS conferences including authors, registrants, reviewers, and of course conference organizers. A user's information will be stored in a general database that will permit automatic form completion based upon the data on file. Some of you may already have received hints as to what the system looks like if you registered for the Associate Editors' Training Session at ICASSP or if you received the invitation to be included in the publications potential reviewer contact database. Both of those staff-driven actions were supported by the most rudimentary version of the future COS – Event Management Tool.

The COS – Event Management Tool will provide:

- Registration, both online and onsite
- Registration Call Center
- Conference Organizer Call Center
- Exhibit and Sponsor Sales
- Call for Demonstrations
- Call for Papers
- Session Scheduling and Management
- Technical Paper Review and Voting
- Speaker/Author Resource Center
- Session Catalog and Personal Scheduler
- Social Networking EventLink™
- Surveys and Event Analytics
- Hotel Reservations
- Event websites (as requested)
- and much more
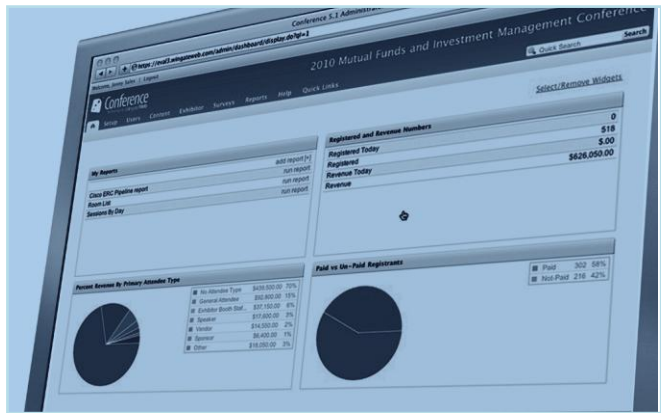
The third tool is the **COS – Conference Organizer Orientation/Training System**. This system is an online learning tool that will be supported by the IEEE eLearning system. IEEE eLearning is a part of IEEE Expert Now, the new, innovative service featuring the best of IEEE's educational content delivered in online learning modules. The system is available 24x7 worldwide with the benefit of eliminating time away from work and travel costs. SPS will develop and maintain content particular to our conference organizers. Look for more information in future issues of the C O Newsletter.

Advisory Committees

Last month we invited several volunteers to serve on advisory committees to guide the development of the COS tools. There are four active advisory committees; (1) accounting; (2) registration and publicity; (3) technical review/paper processing; and (4) conference organizer orientation/training. Each committee comprises three to six volunteers and two SPS Conference Services staff. During the next few months, the advisory committees will guide the customization of the software tools and help to determine what aspects of the tools may require additional training materials.

Transition Plan

Launch of COS is expected before the end of 2010; therefore, the conferences and workshops with paper submission deadlines are before the end of 2010 or in the first quarter of 2011 may not be able to take advantage of the new system. Conferences and workshops whose paper submission deadlines after the first quarter of 2011 will use the COS tools for their registration and technical review and paper processing. These conferences may wish to hire a professional conference organizer to plan and manage the meeting. The PCO would use the accounting, registration, and technical review/paper processing COS tools. Future issues of the C O Newsletter will provide more information about Conference Organizer Solutions.

- Lisa Schwarzbek, Manager Conference Services, l.schwarzbek@ieee.org

Who Does What: Your Conference Services Staff

Some SPS Conference Organizers may not know who the Conference Services staff is or what each of us does for the Society. Below is a simple chart for the Conference Services Department Staff with our basic responsibilities. Nevertheless, you should feel comfortable contacting any or all of us for assistance on any topic.

Lisa D. Schwarzbek
Manager
Conference Services

Linda Skeahan
Conference Administrator

Nicole M. Allen
Meeting Coordinator
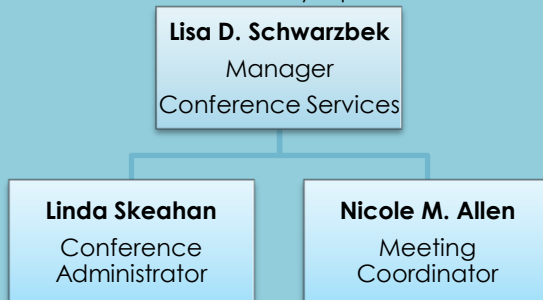
The Manager Conference Services:
- manage conference services staff and resources
- comptroller for conference finances
- COS
- puts into effect policy and procedures
- review contracts, final reports, MOUs
- support SPS Conference Board initiatives

The Conference Administrator:
- IEEE Compliance:
  - administer financial co-sponsorship applications and MOUs
  - Coordinate conference concentration bank accounts
  - handle contract payments, purchase orders, and invoices
  - maintain up-to-date resources for conference organizers
  - monitor timely submission of required documents and conference proceedings
  - process budgets, reports, and financial documents

The Meeting Coordinator:
- administrative support:
  - administer technical co-sponsorship applications and MOUs
  - handle conference surveys and reports
  - maintain up-to-date and accurate conference information on the SPS website
  - process call for papers and other conference related e-notices

New SPS Conference Survey Service

The Standard Survey

The SPS Conference Services staff has created a standard, online survey that can be issued to your conference attendees.

The survey was designed with core survey design principles:

1. A minimal number of questions are asked so that the survey does not take more than 20 minutes to complete;

2. Short and simple questions promote more accurate responses;

3. The survey flows from one topic to the next, with questions appearing in logical order.

4. The most important questions appear early because survey drop-offs tend to occur toward the end;

5. Leading questions (those in which the question posed suggests the desired response) are avoided.

The "standard" online survey is available for use by all SPS-sponsored conferences. The survey may be "tweaked" to reflect the particular needs of an individual conference; however, changes from the standard survey will result in delayed transmittal. To issue the online survey please contact me. It typically takes two to three weeks from notification to transmittal. To issue a survey a conference must provide the E-mail addresses for all attendees and the desired date of transmittal (within one week of the end of the conference is ideal).

Normally, a survey remains active for three weeks. Once the survey is deactivated the data is sent to me within a few days. I review the data and create a report of the results. The report is e-mailed to the General Chair(s) of the conference, the VP-Conferences, the Executive Director, and the Manager Conference Services.

Why Survey?

Surveys are an important source of information from delegates. Their feedback not only measures satisfaction it also guides goal-setting and provides ideas on how to improve and grow SPS Society conferences.

Surveys help conference organizers and the Society's Conference Board to make important decisions. They provide documentation that may help to determine the Society's approach to future conferences as well as help determine the areas where improvement is needed

The satisfaction of conference attendees is extremely important. The happier the attendee, the more likely he/she will attend again and will promote the conference to their colleagues.

The benefits of using surveys are countless, but the few described above will help to take the conference to the next level of quality and attendee satisfaction.

- Nicole Allen, Meeting Coordinator, n.allen@ieee.org

Handling Non-Presented Papers: Before and After

The SPS Board of Governors approved a revision to SPS Policy 7.13 Technical Meeting No-Show. The new policy provides that papers that have been accepted by a SPS conference but are not presented will not be included in the proceedings published on IEEE Xplore. For more information on the policy please see the February edition of the CO Newsletter. (http://www.signalprocessingsociety.org/conferences/conference-resources/)

The most critical step in handling non-presented papers occurs before the conference. It is critical to make sure that in the conference call for papers, on the website, and in every communication to authors clearly states the following: *"IEEE reserves the right to exclude a paper from distribution after the conference (e.g., removal from IEEE Xplore) if the paper is not presented at the conference."*

How does a Conference Organizer handle the papers of the authors who do not present their papers? There are four steps to the process and all must be completed without delay after the conference.

Step One, collect accurate 'non-presented' data during the conference. This data should be provided to the Technical Program Chair who must approve the final list.   Be sure that the paper submission number that is tagged to the authors continues to be linked to the session number in the proceedings. Breaking the link will make it very difficult to match the authors who have legitimate reasons for not presenting with the session numbers in the proceedings.

Step Two, upon approval from the Technical Program Chair, format the proceedings files and build the packing list noting the 'non-presented' papers as 'suppress' and send the proceedings to IEEE eXpress Conference Publishing.   Please do not delay the timely submission of the proceedings to complete the appeals process. Proceedings are due to IEEE eXpress no later than **30 days** of the last day of the conference. Organizers should consider this deadline a contractual obligation fulfilling the conference's part of the proceedings acquisition by IEEE.

Step Three, notify the authors whose papers were reported as 'non-presented' and give them a period of time (maximum three weeks) to appeal the ruling. Reasons for reversed rulings can fall within the following categories; 1) unable to travel due to visa issue, family emergency, weather emergency, or world event such as a terrorist threat or epidemic or 2) they did present or a proxy presented, the data reported is incorrect.

Step Four, after the appeals process is complete, submit any reversed decisions to IEEE eXpress Conference Publishing.

Caveat 1: If the reversed decisions are beyond three weeks after the submission of the proceedings these papers will be viewable **only** to Xplore users. They will not be indexed by IEEE's downstream partners such as Thomson and Elsevier.   Both Thomson's and Elsevier's electronic data interchange processes are structured to take only a single version of an IEEE conference's proceedings (i.e., they do not accept incremental adds/changes/deletes).

Caveat 2: If a paper is not marked as a 'no-show' upon submission to IEEE; we cannot go into the system later to mark it as 'Suppressed' or un-publish the paper. Once an article is published on IEEEXplore it is on IEEEXplore forever.

- Lisa Schwarzbek, Manager Conference Services,
l.schwarzbek@ieee.org
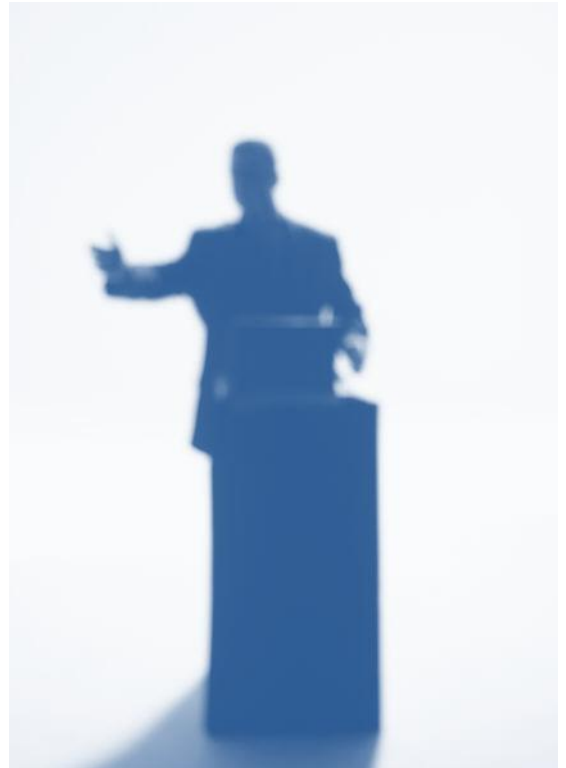
Upcoming Submission Deadlines

Call For Papers	Location	Date	Tutorial/Special Session	Submission Deadline
2010 IEEE Workshop on Information Forensics and Security (WIFS)	Seattle, Washington, USA	December 12-15, 2010	N/A	June 15, 2010
2010 IEEE Spoken Language Technology Workshop (SLT)	Berkeley, California, USA	December 12-15, 2010	N/A	July 16, 2010
2011 Digital Signal Processing and Signal Processing Education Meeting (DSP/SPE)	Sedona, Arizona, USA	January 4-7, 2011	N/A	August 30, 2010

JUNE 2010

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Upcoming Conferences and Workshops

Upcoming Conferences	Location	Advanced Registration	Conference Dates
IEEE 11th International Workshop on Signal Processing Advances in Wireless Communications (SPAWC)	Marrakech, Morocco	June 13, 2010	June 20-23, 2010
2010 IEEE International Conference on Multimedia & Expo (ICME)	Singapore	May 31, 2010	July 19-23, 2010
The 6th International Conference on Natural Language Processing and Knowledge Engineering (NLP-KE)	Beijing, China	July 20, 2010	August 21-23, 2010
2010 IEEE International Workshop on Machine Learning for Signal Processing (MLSP)	Kittila. Finland	June 23, 2010	August 29 – September 1, 2010
7th IEEE International Conference on Advanced Video and Signal-Based Surveillance (AVSS)	Boston, Massachusetts, USA	July 2, 2010	August 29 – September 1, 2010

JULY 2010

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IEEE Offices will be closed Monday, 5 July in honor of the US 4th of July holiday.

AUGUST 2010

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Send your suggestions or comments to Lisa Schwarzbek at l.schwarzbek@ieee.org.

Past editions of the CO Newsletter can be found on the SPS website.

Next Issue:

COS – Conference Organizer Solutions

Preview of the Conference Board Meeting

"Top 10" Conference Policies & Procedures

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IEEE Signal Processing Society