

# Running the ETD2005 conference



'Hey, this has been a fantastic conference! Why don't we try to get it to Australia next year?'

So we work hard on our bid, and when the selection panel announce that the next venue is Sydney... the flood of what, how and who comes thundering down --- all those decisions: theme, venue amenities, program, keynotes, website, registration fees, social program, printing, media coverage, securing delegates, meeting aspirations for a truly memorable event, showcasing the industrious Australasian environment, and btw can we afford a conference organiser???

Like eating an elephant, the way to proceed is one byte at a time.

Solutions for organising the '8th International ETD symposium — ETD2005: evolution through discovery...' invariably revolved around people. First, securing the commitment of people who worked well together; whose skills were complementary; who would put the conference outcomes before their own. And leading up to the conference, encouraging people to contribute to tasks, follow through actions with enthusiasm and speed and have lots of fun along the way.

The 'people elements' of our conference were many: a conference driver to initiate action, be ever-flexible and see a problem (after initial panic!) as just a bend in the road, leading to new opportunities — Tony Cargnelutti was our fantastic driver; a champion or two to make the financial way clear; vibrant world class keynotes: some magnets, some less-exposed; an international, multicultural mix of delegates; a groundswell of friendly, service-focused volunteers; conference organisers with a black belt in budgeting and scheduling; flexible sponsors and supporters to provide both for our needs and theirs; committed committee members augmented by a large local and global team to assess abstracts, referee papers and ensure a 5-star program; knowledgeable media journalists reporting conference highlights; staff photographers securing memories of events and good times; a talented staff web designer to deliver effective communication.

The first question asked often is 'How many people attended?' That's easy — over 200. For us, there were more important objectives that if met, would indicate conference success.



David Cunnington (Melbourne) and Ozi Orji (Nigeria) at the conference Internet cafe

### Goal 1: Delegates from many countries

An important goal was for delegates from as many developing countries as possible to attend. Our overall subject matter — issues and solutions for increasing access to scholarly research — is of vital interest to all countries.

Securing widespread involvement was a challenge. Our conference 'driver' made successful representation to many benevolent organisations. The Open Society Institute/Soros Foundation was generous in providing full support for a number of delegates and partial funding was provided by UNESCO India, University of NSW, VTLS (Visionary Technology in Library Service) Inc., the University of Technology, Sydney and the Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (NDLTD) Board.

After gaining financial support for these delegates, there was extra admin. work, including individual letters of invitation to meet requirements for Australian visa applications and answering many specific questions regarding flights, accommodation and visiting Australia.

All the effort was well worth it. We had delegates from 25 countries; a massive 48 per cent of delegates were from overseas: Nigeria, Canada, Belgium, Ghana, Jamaica, Kenya, India, Lithuania, New Zealand, China, Peru, Zambia and many more... The positive feedback has been strongest from delegates of countries who had never attended a previous ETD symposium. Every Australian state and territory was also represented. We had a fantastic range of speakers from across the world who represented wide-ranging ETD, institutional repository and scholarly outputs program involvement, from very new entrants to long time contributors (Aka Akakendalwa, Stevan Harnad); from the first innovative creators of dynamic web-based ETDs in Australia (Simon Pockley, Craig Bellamy); creative innovators in communicating ideas (Robyn Wil-



Todd Mundle (Canada) and Christine Wilson (New Zealand) at the conference poster session

liams, Xiaolin Zhang); and a speaker on the enormous IT infrastructure being currently rolled out in China (Hai Jin).

### Goal 2: Aligning our message and our practice

Full conference papers and PowerPoint presentations are available at the ETD2005 conference website. Posting papers and presentations exclusively to the web as well as allowing authors to self-archive and retain copyright was simply a first step. Given the open access philosophy of ETDs, we hope to see future papers self-archived into an ETD conference repository — if we don't walk the talk, how can we expect it of researchers at our institutions??

### Goal 3: To experience springtime in Sydney

Keeping in mind that the conference experience would be 'Australia' to many delegates, we were able to arrange for the conference to occur in September, which in Sydney is generally a great time for weather and gardens. Delegates who attended (despite the dates falling within northern-hemisphere university semesters) had a wonderful taste of Australia with a sunny Sydney Harbour cruise to end the conference.

### Goal 4: Many hands and minds

Registration fees needed to be kept low. At the same time, it was important for all delegates — including keynote and other invited speakers — to feel very welcome and to feel their time was well spent. The solution was all around us: volunteers and networks!

Library staff volunteers from the University of New South Wales and University of Technology, Sydney were critical during the three days of the conference. Volunteers took their role seriously and made extra efforts to look the part. Friendly personalities and willingness to help provided excellent support for even the least confident delegates. The success of the conference was due to many factors, and the volunteers were a major one.

Our networks were also key contributors of support and conference expertise — locally the Australian Digital Theses (ADT) Program Committee and internationally the NDLTD Board. The venue for this conference, the Scientia, also contributed enormously to the smooth running of the event.

Several months later... We've written the reports, loaded events photos to the web and posted photo CDs to our delegates with limited download capability. Very soon there'll be no trace of elephant. Would we do it again? Maybe... In hindsight, are we glad we did it? Definitely!!

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*Wilfredo Villalta (Sydney) and Sarah Towle (Sydney)*



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