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Comments on the 1966 ADI Meeting

Ann Luke

10 October 1967
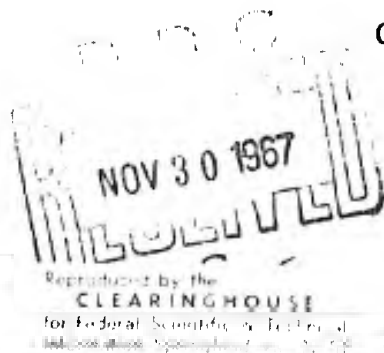
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$\mathbb{S}\mathbb{P}$ *a professional paper.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Convention planners need help, and there exist few sources from which they can draw material.[1] Over the years, ADI convention planners have taken a dynamic approach to their annual meetings; the idea of a series of paper-readings, spiced only by a guest speaker here and there, has long been discarded. They discovered that their attendees liked opportunities for lively discussion, free question-asking, and "big-picture" reviewing. They have arrived at their conclusions by asking the member whether he liked a particular meeting; whether he benefited from it; which aspects, topics, sessions, were successful and which were not, etc.

This paper summarizes results from a questionnaire prepared for the 1966 annual meeting of the American Documentation Institute. Although business and personal commitments kept the author from publishing the paper at the time the results were tabulated, a draft of the results was made available to planners of the 1967 meeting.

The 1966 meeting of the ADI was held from 3 through 7 October in Santa Monica, California, with approximately 750 attendees, including students and those who attended one-day sessions only. The meeting appeared to be successful--well attended and well received. This was despite some apprehension on the part of the convention planners that the west coast location would not draw many of the east coast members, who constitute the majority of ADI membership; that government restrictions on travel would present a further impedance; and that some innovative aspects of the meeting might not realize the success that it was hoped they would.

For the 1963 and 1964 ADI annual meetings,[2] detailed surveys have been made to analyze attendees' reactions. This year, a more general survey was conducted. Planners felt that previous years' experience had resolved many of the questions that convention planners face, such as what types of sessions are popular, how long the convention should be, or whether it is valuable to print the proceedings in advance of the meeting. The questionnaire covering this year's meeting was thus designed to gain general opinions on the features that the attendees liked or disliked, to provide them with the opportunity to comment on any aspects they wished, and to gauge their overall impressions.

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[1]An ADI convention manual, a draft of which is being circulated for review, is a welcome effort to create such a source.

[2]The 1965 convention was not reported on, because it was held in conjunction with the FID annual congress.

1.2 Content

This paper reports on the results of that questionnaire, shown as Figure 1.
Section 2 outlines the general convention concept and the types of sessions
included. Section 3 explains the breakdown of groups of attendees and the break-
down of responses reported. Results of specific questions in the survey are
presented in Section 4, and Section 5 concludes with some thoughts of this
author on the survey results and the convention itself.

2. CONVENTION CONCEPT

A key innovative feature of the 1966 ADI convention was a series of Progress
Review Sessions built around the first volume of the Annual Review of Informa-
tion Science and Technology. Sponsored by the ADI, in conjunction with the
National Science Foundation and SDC, the volume was the first in a series of
annual reviews in which key personnel in information science survey and analyze
the literature that has been produced in the field in the previous year.

As described by the Technical Program Chairman, the Progress Review Sessions
were designed as follows:

> Four of the eight major time blocks (full morning or afternoon)
> will be devoted largely to "Progress Reviews." In each such
> session, content areas corresponding to chapters in ADI's
> forthcoming ADI Annual Review series will be reviewed in panel
> fashion. The author of the chapter covering 1965 literature
> will give a 30-minute presentation, to be followed by panel
> discussion for approximately 45 minutes. The panel will include
> the designated author of the succeeding year's review and two
> other discussants. One of the latter three individuals will
> serve as chairman.

The remainder of the technical sessions were described by the Technical Program
Chairman as follows:

> The other two major technical events will be the Author Forums and
> Discussion Groups. The Forums will be similar to those which have
> been conducted for the past two ADI conventions, but with two
> changes. First, sessions will be scheduled within about eight
> topic groups. Within each group, scheduling conflicts will be
> minimized or entirely avoided. Secondly, authors will uniformly
> be asked to give a ten to fifteen minute presentation (summary)
> at the beginning of their Forum to permit wider audience under-
> standing and participation. This arrangement will combine the
> best features of a paper session with those of the unstructured
> author forums.

WILL YOU PLEASE HELP . . .

    the planning for the 1967 ADI Convention

      by spending 5 minutes after the convention to complete this
      brief form?

1. Are you a member of ADI?   _____

2. How many ADI conventions have you attended previously?   _____

3. How would you rate the overall quality of this convention compared
    with previous ADI (or other) conventions you have attended?

    ___Excellent   ___Very good   ___Good   ___Fair   ___Poor

4. What features did you like best about this convention?

5. What specific things could have been added, deleted, or handled
    differently to make this convention a better one?

6. What specific topics or events would you like to have included in
    future ADI conventions?

Figure 1

The Questionnaire (sheet 1)

7. The Program Chairman for the 1967 convention, Paul Fasano, is interested in learning who might wish to prepare a paper for the 1967 convention and who might want to participate by chairing a tutorial or review session, user group, discussion group, etc. Please indicate below:

(a) I would be interested in preparing a paper. ☐ Yes ☐ No

(b) I would be interested in chairing the following type of session:

(If you have expressed an interest, please be sure to sign below.)

THANK YOU for your help!

If you will provide your name and address, we will send you a copy of the report based on this questionnaire.

_____
(Name)

_____

_____
(Address)

Please mail this form to:

Miss Ann C. Walker
Convention Evaluation Committee
16531 Sunset Boulevard, Apt. 3
Pacific Palisades, California 90272

Figure 1

The Questionnaire (sheet 2)

Another convention innovation has proved to be so popular that convention chairmen, startled at its success, have had to make hasty last-minute arrangements to accommodate the crowds. This is a series of "Tutorials"--sessions in which leaders in the field gave basic introductory "courses" in six major areas and described problems and success in the selected topic areas.

Planned presentations by exhibitors provided formal descriptions of the products being displayed, and were regularly scheduled as a part of the program. Other features that seemed to be popular with attendees included: two outstanding guest speakers, the famed semanticist, Dr. S. I. Hayakawa, and the President of the American Library Association, Robert Vosper; the information theater, a regularly scheduled convention event in which films are shown on various topics and innovations in information science; meetings of the ADI's Special Interest Groups, which convened during the afternoon preceding the formal convention opening; and a newly inaugurated Prize Papers session, in which three award papers were delivered at a plenary session on the convention's final day. Of course, there was little doubt that the final event on the final night-- a visit to Disneyland--would be popular.

3. WHO ATTENDED, AND WHO RESPONDED TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE?

This meeting had many Nonmembers attending. Special sessions--of the SLA, the STWP, and a group of behavioral scientists--account for many of them. Of the total 654 regular attendees, 228 were nonmembers. This does not include 22 students and 77 one-day registrations.

A total of 120 responses were received, or not quite 20% of the "regular" attendance. ("Regular" here is meant to include attendees of the week-long convention, rather than one-day only attendees.) 30 were received from Nonmembers and 90 from Members. Responses are divided into Nonmember and Member categories in two sections of this report, to show how answers differed between those familiar with ADI and those who might be considered newcomers to the field of information science or the ADI.

4. WHAT DID THE RESPONDENTS SAY?

4.1 General Ratings

Question: How would you rate the overall quality of this convention compared with previous ADI (or other) conventions you have attended?

___Excellent ___Very good ___Good ___Fair ___Poor

Overall, the ratings were as follows:

Excellent: 37% Very good: 40% Good: 20% Fair: 3% Poor: 0

Members' ratings were:

Excellent: 42%   Very good: 39%   Good: 17%   Fair: 2%

Nonmembers' ratings, though high, were somewhat less favorable:

Excellent: 16%   Very good: 40%   Good: 36%   Fair: 8%

It is interesting to note that a subdivision of the Member category--35 respondents who had attended four or more previous ADI meetings-- expressed even more enthusiasm than overall respondents. Of this subset, 21 out of the 35 rated the meeting Excellent; 13 rated it Very good; and only 1 rated it Good.

Perhaps those experienced with ADI activities have a general level of expectation about ADI conventions that is lower than the expectance level of one who has not attended many of them. Or, it is possible that some of those who are "experienced" with ADI conventions have become experienced in some aspect of the planning and running of a convention and are thus more familiar with the problems and pitfalls.

4.2 Best-liked Features

Question: What features did you like best about this convention?

Many of the raters commented on the types of sessions in indicating the features they liked best. Other responses were more general--favoring the high quality of speakers, the variety of sessions, the availability of printed proceedings, and other aspects.

The most popular features, in decreasing order of importance, were as follows (note that many respondents gave several replies):

1.   Progress Review Panels 28%.
2.   Author Forums 22.5%.
3.   Scheduling and organization of the convention 20.8%.
4.   Quality and coverage of topics 19%.
5.   The Annual Review 17.5% (it is difficult in many cases to determine whether this refers to the publication itself or to the sessions built around its chapters).
6.   Tutorial sessions 17.5%.
7.   Discussion Groups 10.8%.
8.   The availability of printed proceedings 7.5%.
9.   The informality of the convention 5%.
10. The pace of events 5%.

Comparison of ratings of Nonmembers and Members shows that the types of sessions are rated approximately the same, with one major exception: Non-members rated Tutorials as the best feature, while Members rated it 7th in order of

importance.[1] Other items receiving some "votes" for popularity were the
exhibitors; presentations; the talks by Dr. Hayakawa and Mr. Vosper; the
arrangement of events leading up to a "grand finale" at the end of the week;
and the excellent audio-visual support. One important item that received
favorable comment--though not always in this portion of the questionnaire (it
was sometimes given in answer to question #6) was the fact that speakers at
this meeting seemed to concentrate more on "hard data"--that is, they talked
more in realities than in theories. As one respondent put it, "They had meat
between the bread." Other respondents commended this "factual approach," but
urged that still more emphasis on fact was needed.

A typical Nonmember's response indicates a reason for the popularity of the
convention. He said that it provided

> ...the opportunity...for non-specialists to get a
> good picture of the field and its developments.

In a general comment on quality, a respondent said,

> The reviewer and panelists added to each other
> and didn't keep repeating what was said before.

A member who had attended six previous ADI conventions called it "One of the
most fruitful meetings that I've attended."

Several of the respondents indicated that they felt the events moved very well,
neither too quickly nor dragging. One said that it had "a fast start and you
kept going." Another said:

> Impetus built up during [the] Convention so that [the] last
> day was best of all; usually, meetings run down toward the
> end.

A number of attendees noted with favor the minimum of overlap between sessions.
One said:

> The time and place allocation of simultaneous papers appeared
> well handled; I experienced few agonizing choices of which
> of several sessions to attend.

A member who has attended more than 5 previous ADI meetings said:

> The types of sessions being offered; the way that they
> were mixed; and the concurrent sessions and the degree

---

[1]However, the popularity of Tutorials with Members was overwhelming.
convention planners expected a group of from 25 to 75 attendees at each
tutorial; instead, they found crowds of up to 400 at the sessions!

in which the different types were run concurrently
added up to the best ADI yearly that I have attended.
The heavy attendance at most sessions and the apparent
satisfaction of attendees attests to the success of
the meeting.

Other comments in response to "What features did you like best?" were:

. Availability of Proceedings and Annual Review so that formal presentation
of papers is not required.

. The Progress Review sessions were good—especially where the principal
reviewer could talk clearly for someone of my level of understanding.

. The effort that was made to keep thing on schedule.

. Easy informality and small groups.

. The Technical [sic] Review Panels that worked (some did not, of course)
were much superior to the usual sessions of formal presentations of papers
at previous conventions. Author Forums continue to be good.

. A more realistic approach as opposed to a purely theoretical one.

. Mixture of different sessions so that individuals could interact with
authors and discussion groups.

. The scheduling of the "big social event" on the first night allows for
much more meeting and mixing.

. Superior presentations by the panelists.

. Compact site with high density of relevant people. No matter where you
turned, you could find somebody to talk to that was relevant to your own
interests.

4.3 Things to be Added, Deleted, or Changed

Question: What specific things could have been added, deleted, or
           handled differently to make this convention a better one?

In addition to the successful features, the convention had a number of faults.
For example, two of the most serious faults were found with the buffet dinner,
which was the second most criticized item among Members and the most criti-
cized one among Nonmembers, and distribution of the Annual Review and Proceed-
ings, neither of which was available before the meeting.

The dinner was considered a failure because of high cost and very long waiting
lines. Planners had overestimated the capabilities of the hotel management.
Publication of the Proceedings in advance was a good intention that was not
carried out because of communication lapses in the preparation of the contract

with the publisher. (Distribution of the Annual Review was never contemplated and is not feasible, given the publication time schedule and a number of other factors.)

The failure to publish and update a list of attendees was also heavily criticized. Other criticisms or suggestions had to do with the hotel meeting rooms (too cold or too noisy), the number of concurrent sessions, and the substance (or lack of it) in some of the discussions and panels.

A constructive suggestion made by several respondents was that the content of the tutorial sessions be published, either before or after the meeting--a thought that might be noted by future convention planners.

Members suggested the following items for addition, deletion, or change (items are listed in decreasing frequency of mention):

1. Distribute the Annual Review in advance (some suggested including the price in the registration fee).

2. Omit the buffet.

3. Distribute the Proceedings before the meeting.

4. Have the Progress Review sessions update the material, rather than "rehashing" it. (The suggestion was made that the author of the chapter only comment on the panelists' talks, rather than preparing a formal talk himself.)

5. Improve hotel conditions (cold and noise).

6. Have fewer concurrent sessions (especially Author Forums).

7. Delete night sessions.

8. Publish and update a list of attendees.

9. Improve the quality of the panelists invited.

10. Print the Tutorials.

Other comments called for more tours, with space for more people; better organization of sessions, such as Discussion Groups; improvement of microphones, lighting, visuals; giving the Special Interest Groups more prominence; having the exhibitors' presentations longer or more frequent; giving the audience more opportunity for participation in panel discussions; announcing the prize papers ahead of time; and adding panels that will debate a topic rather than merely review it.

There were other miscellaneous features mentioned in this segment of the questionnaire; but all have been passed on to the chairmen of the 1967 and 1968 ADI conventions.

The general response indicates that criticisms or suggested changes were more closely related to the techniques for running a convention, rather than with its content. There was comparatively little dissatisfaction with the speakers and the material covered; in fact, there was more general agreement on the high quality of speakers and material than on faults with these.

The features that Nonmembers would add, delete, or change were:

1. Omit the buffet.

2. Have more on actual solutions to problems, actual systems in operation.

3. Publish and update a list of attendees

4. Improve the meeting rooms.

5. Distribute Annual Review in advance.

6. Tell attendees about the Annual Review ahead to time so that they can buy it.

7. Publish the Tutorials, either before or after the meeting.

Other items noted by a few Nonmembers included: improve the PA facilities; include more discussion groups; spread out the discussion groups, to give attendees a chance to attend more than one; be sure that authors are present at their Author Forums [can it be that some were not?]; include managers of library and information centers as panelists; make more general discussions of the Progress Review sessions; analyze the failures in automation; announce the prize papers in advance so that everyone can read them before the Prize Papers session; and delete Author Forums at which the authors merely read their papers [most authors followed the format and did not do this].

In general, the criticisms were not harsh, and only a few were shared by a significant number of the Nonmember respondents.

Some random comments about "things you would add, delete, or change":

. Many concurrent papers are presented and are of interest. Possibly papers can be presented twice.

. The effectiveness of the panel discussions was largely lost by relying on review articles which few had read.

. Have a list of attendees at the start of the convention. A.C.S. uses a Cardex file which can be updated very easily.

. Eliminate author sessions if the author is only going to read his paper. I can read. I just can't write.

. Since many convention members did not read the entire proceedings, earlier announcement of prize papers would have given many of us the

chance to read the papers before they were presented. Almost all questions and comments came from people who had attended the author forums and had therefore been exposed to the paper before.

. Concentrate less on the statement of the problem and more on the solutions.

. More publication of the fact that Annual Review and Proceedings were necessary to effective participation in convention.

. More papers or reports of actual systems...not the great...dream of the future.

. More tutorial. More tours to SDC and data processing centers.

Some answers to this question bordered on the adamant:

. Encourage the fuzzy-minded government and scholastic speakers to find something objective to say and say it concisely.

. Principal reviewer reviewed a review. Other panelists reviewed him (mostly).

. Get rid of the con men. How in the world did a bunch of encyclopedia salesmen get on the premises? I was told more exaggerations in 5 minutes than I heard in the last six months. Keep these guys at the state fairs and carnivals.

Other comments were more constructive:

. Better control of progress review panels to ensure substance, rather than platitudes, in panelists' comments.

. Add panels, or teams, to debate, dissect...a subject...i.e., have an assigned subject for which three, four, or more members may present their various viewpoints.

A few of the comments added a bit of lightheartedness:

. Think the really grotty physical surroundings detracted considerably from the pleasure and profit to be gained from the sessions. While one can indeed have a useful intellectual discussion anywhere, one gets depressed attending a week-long conference in such frowsty meeting rooms.

. Please don't schedule important technical events after 5 PM. My attention span doesn't permit my participation and, besides, late sessions interfere with my social life.

And finally, one respondent said simply:

. Less coffee.

5.4 Topics or Events to be Included in Future ADI Conventions

    Question: What specific topics or events would you like to have
    included in future ADI conventions?

The list of suggested topics and events is long and cannot be neatly summarized.
Plann rs for the next two ADI conventions have been given copies of the list,
and ⹁ copy is being sent to the national headquarters for the use of planners
of future conventions. It is not repeated here.

It might be interesting, however, to note a few of the suggestions. They
indicate several things: (1) no one topic was sadly neglected; (2) there are
many topics yet to be explored in ADI conventions; (3) there is a great deal of
interest in what one respondent called "hard data"--fact--particularly,
negative fact. Many of the respondents wanted to hear about systems, or
features of systems, that failed, and why. They felt that the "why it didn't
work" approach could teach them as much as the "here is how it does work"
approach, and perhaps more.

Some of the suggested topics are:

  . Examples of successful information retrieval systems, system failure,
intrasystem interfaces.

  . Research in the field of abstracting, indexing, quality control problems
ethical problems.

  . International efforts in information science.

  . Small systems--personal files: software, size, turnaround time, cost.

  . Industry-government-research facility-university interchange: progress
and problems in each area.

  . Is a mathematics background essential for an information sci .

  . What can the social sciences and humanities do for information s
and vice versa?

These and the many other suggested topics show that attendees at ADI conver
are interested in the subjects presented, and go to the conventions no
socialize, but to learn. Eighty responden⁺s included a response to the ques on,
although some of them were more in the nature of general comments, su
following:

  . The audiences appeared to be just as qualified as the participants,
therefore, I think the audience members should have been allowed more time
to express themselves. After all, ADI attracts scientists and other
professionals from all over the country, and I think they should have
more than ten minutes out of a ninety-minute program...

. More time for discussions.

. ...future programs raising controversial points of view that are not negative in a destructive sense, but are constructively different would enjoy a well-deserved and well-attended session.

. More "how to do it" type sessions.

. More time for visiting computerized organizations and <u>actual performance</u> demonstrations of hardware and software.

. Greater (or at least equal) incentive for participants who achieved progress in <u>standardization!</u> (Another award in addition to excellence of author papers.)

. Some kind of function, albeit modest, for wives would be useful.

. Continue the emphasis on presentation of "HARD DATA" instead of "Rosy Plans for the Future."

. It seems appropriate to have a session on the problem of what is unique from the computer point of view about the use of the computer by documentalists as compared with its use for, say, business data processing applications.

Some responses were very heart-warming:

. Very good convention as a whole!

. No comment--this one covered all (and more) of my interests.

5. <u>CONCLUSIONS</u>

Many of the attendees at the 1966 ADI Convention were not members of the organization, and if the questionnaire responses are indicative of the general feeling, they received a well-prepared introduction to the field and to the organization.

In keeping with its interest in innovations in communication, ADI has strived to incorporate innovative ideas into its conventions; so, in addition to the Tutorial sessions for those new to the field or in need of "brushing up," they also provided a type of session for the experienced person, in the form of broad-view panels of experts discussing the major developments and trends. The small discussion groups and the forums for discussion with authors, rather than mere listening hours, complemented the first two types of sessions. None of the sessions seemed to be unpopular. Another expression of interest is the twenty-seven respondents, or about 22%, who indicated an interest in chairing a session or otherwise helping with the next convention, and the forty-six respondents (over 35%) who said that they would be interested in submitting a paper to the next convention.

The author is grateful to those who responded to the questionnaire. The suggestions and criticisms were valuable, and indicative of an interest in continued improvement of ADI conventions.

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13. ABSTRACT

    Summarizes results from a questionnaire prepared for the 1966 annual meeting of the American Documentation Institute and reports on these results. Outlines the general convention concept and the types of sessions it included. Concludes with the author's thoughts on the survey results and on the convention itself.

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