



## **REPORT ON THE MACE CONGRESS 2015 COMPILED BY THE UNIZULU COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING DIVISION**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The University of Zululand served as hosts of the 2015 MACE Congress. The staff at the University's Communications and Marketing Division under the leadership of Normah Zondo were largely responsible for organizing the congress. It should however be stated that a lot of support was received from the MACE board, the regional leadership and from other institutions in KwaZulu-Natal.

The congress was held from October 7 to 9; however the preparations began early in the year. This report will highlight the challenges experienced in organizing the congress with the hope that such will be used to ensure that such challenges are addressed or averted in the future.

This is the reason perhaps that the report will focus mainly on the challenges rather than the success. Apart from highlighting the challenges the team has made a number of recommendations that should be taken into consideration by planners of future congresses.

The report has been broken down into three main parts, namely: The pre-congress preparations; the work during the congress and the post congress duties.

### **1. PRE-CONGRESS PREPARATIONS**

#### **1.1. ONLINE REGISTRATION**

The online registration process was managed by Devman. Devman created a database of all MACE delegates from various institutions. They also created an electronic invite which they sent to all the delegates on the database. This process was effective as there was no need to send more than 160 plus invitations individually.

#### **Challenges with the Online Registration Process**

- System Error – most delegates complained that they could open the invite but when they clicked on the registration link which was embedded on the invite, it will just give them an error, hence causing the delay in registration or even meaning that Devman had to resend the invite.
- Junk Mail - some notified us that they couldn't find the invite on their email inbox and had to retrieve the invite from their junk mail.

- Mobile Phone numbers – most delegates on the database didn't have their mobile numbers captured. This created a problem as we were communicating some information regarding the conference via sms's
- Tours Selection – We had four tours which the delegates had to choose from. They should have had an option to select only one. However the delegates were able to select up to three tours which created a problem for us coordinating the conference and the person coordinating the tours.
- When invitations were sent it so happened that they were also sent out to people who were speakers at the previous congress thus creating confusion as to whether these people were being re-invited as speakers to what was then an upcoming congress.

## **Recommendations: DevMan**

### **1. Invitation Communications and RSVP**

Challenge: There were many members who were confused about the registration process; for some of them we had to resend the invitation up to four or five times.

Suggestion: Some acknowledged that they ignored the email invitations and other notifications since they did not recognise the UNIZULU based sender. Since the university congress host changes annually, it may be better if the invitation is always sent from a MACE email (eg **congress@mace.org.za** etc.) thus building MACE brand recognition. Also with each invitee receiving an the invitation and responding online via RSVP, we can then enforce some data gathering such as cell number, allowing us to SMS delegates during the event.

### **2. Data Quality**

Challenge: Since some institutions had not submitted their membership lists earlier in the year, there was quite a bit of rushed last minute capture of member details and repeat send of new invitations to these members.

Suggestion: Ongoing communications with members for regional events, an annual appeal for members to update their details online (including cell phone numbers) and general database maintenance should go a long way toward improving data quality for Congress 2016.

### **3. Invoicing**

Challenge: Invoicing presented the biggest administrative challenge: A myriad changes were requested by member institutions – changes of contact details, differing payment terms, changes to numbers attending, and not including payment reference when making payment.

Suggestion: The DevMan team handled this administrative task this year, to get a better understanding of it. It would be ideal for someone working within MACE to handle this function, allowing them to dovetail the invoicing activity with accounts receipts / reconciliation.

### **4. Invitee Management**

Challenge: Because payment terms are made at institutional level, not by attendees, there is limited control of people attending. Hence the UNIZULU hosts encountered many 'gate-crashers' especially at evening event level – with member institutions simply changing their attendees at last minute or sending more than paid for.

Suggestion: Many events are managed on a per seat basis – allowing for online payment, invitee verification and generally a more granular management of attendees. This of course is a significant change and may not be possible, but it would be good to at least work towards a stricter protocol for event attendees.

## **1.2. INVOICING**

The invoicing process was seamless and was done efficiently by Devman. As soon as people registered to attend the conference an invoice was issued to them promptly.

### **Challenges with Invoicing**

- “Chopping and changing” - We encountered a lot of problems with delegates chopping and changing invoicing details such as names to be added and / or omitted on the invoice.
- Multiple invoicing – invoicing of more than one person on one invoice ended up causing a lot of confusion, as delegates continually made names additions and cancellation up until the last few days before the conference.

### **Recommendations: Invoicing**

- We highly recommend individual invoicing for the future congress.
- Invoices to be automatically generated as soon as delegate/s confirms attendance.

## **RECONCILIATION**

The total of the invoices that were issued out for the congress give a total figure of R717 050.00. This amount is only for the conference registration, which excluded the fee for the MACE Excellence Awards entries.

Please refer to the attached table for breakdown of invoices.

## **1.3 Guest Speakers**

A total of 16 speakers were invited to the congress by the organizing team.

### **Challenges**

- While most of the responses were positive it was a bit unsettling when we had some of these speakers cancel at the last minute. Some of them cancelled when their booking had already been done.
- As part of the process of securing the speakers, the team had to ensure that their profiles were received and loaded into the website that had been created. However most of the speakers did not comply as most did not submit on time –with a few not submitting at all.

### **Recommendations**

- It would help to have the profiles submitted as early as possible to avoid inconvenience as well as booking the speakers way in advance.
- Where remuneration is possible, this should be considered as it was clear that some of the speakers are only willing to render their services in exchange for some payment. However this has the potential to further drive up the costs of hosting the congress.
- It is therefore advisable to prearrange the standby speaker per session in case the main speaker declines and confirm with the standby speakers should they are required.

### **1.4 Programmes**

The programmes were designed early to ensure that the programme for the congress was clearly mapped out.

### **Challenges**

- The programme kept on changing partly due to speakers pulling out. Also another problem was that some of the sponsors also came on board late.
- In some cases there had to be changes due to the facilitators pulling out.

### **Recommendations**

- Speakers and sponsorships should be secured as early as possible
- The design process should start at least two weeks prior to the event when everything is finalized.

### **1.5 Website**

A specific website was designed and created for the MACE 2015 congress. This was to complement the existing MACE website and was only limited to the congress. The website was also used to upload presentations from the speakers so as to make it easy for delegates to access these

### **Challenges**

- Some of the delegates were under the impression that the registration would be done through the website
- There was slight confusion as well with some of the delegates confusing the two websites but this was countered through communication by including the link in our online posts.

- Some of the speakers never submitted their presentations on time while others never submitted them

### **Recommendations**

- Ensure that delegates are clearly informed about the website and other social media platforms.
- The expectations of presentations that have to be submitted have to be clearly communicated to the speakers. At least effort should be made to get these presentations just before the congress.

## **1.3. DUTIES DURING CONGRESS**

### **2.1 Registration**

Registration stands were manned by personnel for the duration of the congress. These were to ensure that delegates were able to collect their nametags and the conference bag and other material

#### **Challenges:**

- Due to the endless changes made by some of the institutions that meant that some of the nametags had to be printed onsite however there were delays due to technical glitches.
- Ensure that delegates RSVP early and don't entertain the last minutes changes

### **2.2 Tours**

The activities were introduced as ice breakers, something unusual for the conference that they didn't have to pay for them, the delegates relished the activities. It did however bring challenges.

#### **Challenges**

Some people did not choose any activities but when they got there, they demanded to be put on tours that were already full such as the Boat Cruise was nearly cancelled due to overload but it went through as some sacrificed and allowed others to take their spaces.

#### **Recommendations**

- The selection of tours or activities should be strictly regulated during the registration process so that delegates are able to select only one activity and the system should allow them to select one tour that they would be participating on.
- Furthermore, reminders via email and text messages must be sent prior to the first day of the event.
- Emphasis must be made to delegates that there will be no changes made on the day
- Once the activity is full it must be removed immediately from the website etc. and to avoid conflict

- Armbands with different colour codes for the activities must be ready at the registration stand on arrival to make it easy for the organisers and delegates.

### **2.3 Venue**

The MACE Congress was held in Durban at the Greyville Conference Centre. The venue was suitable for the conference since it is located closer to the most tourists' attractions. There is quite a lot of accommodation closer to the Convention Centre in which most delegates booked into to. The conference venue also had an ample parking space for the delegates' vehicles.

#### **Challenges**

- Signage - There wasn't adequate signage at the venue that meant that the organizing team had to make paper printouts in order to ensure that delegates can find their way around the venue and other smaller venues within the Centre.
- Directions to the venue – as much as directions to the venue were clear, we encountered a problem with delegates getting lost and not knowing which entrance to use at the Greyville Conference Centre as the Centre has many different entrances. However the message was communicated via SMS's with the delegates whose numbers were on the database.

#### **Recommendations**

- Ensure visible and adequate signage at the venue
- Email directions with invite as well as GPS coordinates

## **2. POST CONGRESS DUTIES**

### **3.1 Newsletter**

A post congress newsletter was prepared for dissemination after the congress. It was also uploaded to the website. Links to presentations, survey, photos and video were included for easy access.

#### **Recommendations**

The newsletter was a good initiative and we hope future hosts will consider doing the same. It's a great way of summing up the congress and can be shared with other people.

#### **Survey**

A survey was posted on the congress website and communication was sent to the delegates to ensure that they were aware of the survey. This was to help us rate the congress so as to help those who come after us improve where we might have erred.

#### **Challenges**

- A month after the survey was posted on the website only 25 people had participated. It seems that as soon as the delegates walk out of the conference venue they cease to care. While about 160 people attended the congress it is disappointing that only 25 have responded to the survey. Such a low response makes it very difficult to gauge whether the responses are representative of the wide sentiments by the delegates.

### **Recommendations**

- The organisers should try and devise mechanisms which would allow the delegates to rate the conference or the different session while they are still underway. Even social networks such as twitter now allow for surveys and those tools can be explored. The beauty about that is that the results are available in real-time and thus interventions can be made where possible.

### **Some comments received from the delegate survey**

*Question: Which Speaker/s and topic stood out for you?*

Answer: The Speaker on Reputation Management and Crisis Communication were excellent presenters and had real life experience/ examples and expert advice on the discussions thereof

*Question: Which topics would you like to see being included for the next congress?*

Answer: I would like to see delegates from the same discipline having a chance to get together for informal discussions e.g. all the publications people together, the social media people etc.

*Question: Which Speaker/s and topic stood out for you?*

Answer: Janine Lazarus - Crisis Communications Strategic Evening - ICC

*Question: Which Speaker/s and topic stood out for you?*

Answer: Janine Lazarus was excellent - citing excellent examples on crisis communication and having the utmost experience on the topic. The speaker talking about words and images was also good - last parallel session - citing a number of interesting examples The rest of the speakers were not very impressive with some not taking the target audience into account at all

*Question: Which topics would you like to see being included for the next congress?*

Answer: A little more on other aspects of branding and reputation management concepts weight a little more for what we are about in MACE. And maybe on marketing and communications as two separate disciplines than a joint (one and the same) discipline.

*Question: Which topics would you like to see being included for the next congress?*

Answer: Online Marketing Writing winning publications

*Question: Which Speaker/s and topic stood out for you?*

Answer: Challenges Facing Higher Education: The Impact of Conventional Media vs New Media #Social Media - Wayne Roberts How to Handle Political Hot Potatoes - Kiru Naidoo Publications: Words and Images - Rod MacLeod

*Question: Which Speaker/s and topic stood out for you?*

Answer: The Social Media topic was excellent and very informative. The speaker engaged well with the audience. The topic of visual communication and photography was a let-down. The presentation was visually very boring with large blocks of text that was difficult to follow and very little imagery (the presentation was anything but effective visual communication). We were also not sure that the speaker had understood what the topic should be about. It was not what we expected at all.

*Question: Which Speaker/s and topic stood out for you?*

Answer: The Photography session stood out - but not because it was brilliant it was actually intensely mind boggling as to why the speaker was discussing the entry requirements for DUT's photography course. The speaker who spoke about strategic evening was good - her session was interesting because she engaged with the audience. The best session for me hands down was the POPI act. That speaker was well informed and relevant, everyone walked away having learnt something new.

The fact that we entered items in new categories which were not judged merely because there were too few entries in those categories is unfair and makes the process dubious. I will however enter in future and still find the awards process worthwhile

*Question: Which topics would you like to see being included for the next congress?*

Answer: Why not allow delegates from the different organisations to talk about the challenges they face and how they overcome them. We could all learn from that. Topics on compiling outstanding print publications could be helpful, or how to set up a cost-effective social media presence with a limited budget. I really hoped that Dr Abdul-Haq's session would give more pointers on the use of imagery to get marketing messages across, but it was on his PhD. What a disappointment. I somehow sense that the speakers were not adequately briefed on their audience and on specific pointers there talks should address to make it relevant for attendees.

*Question: Which topics would you like to see being included for the next congress?*

Answer: Specific topics on social media, such as how to optimally use LinkedIn. The blanket social media talks are redundant. I would also like to see a bigger focus on websites as marketing tools, as well as other electronic communication platforms and mediums.

*Question: Which topics would you like to see being included for the next congress?*

Answer: Writing for the web/social media Current marketing/Advertising trends

#### **General comments:**

In the next MACE Congress I would like to see the presence of VCs and/ or the direct supervisors of Advancement Teams in HEIs. This, I believe, would go a long way in exposing them to better understand the work entailed in this important faculty in their institutions or even better yet expose them to what other institutions are doing. Perhaps from that we would see better budget allocation and resourcing for the MACE teams from HEIs. Overall a job well done to the outgoing board and the best of luck to the new. We look forward to 2016 congress.

Thanks to the organizers for all the hard work! It's a mammoth task.

All session should be recorded for delegates to view parallel sessions that they have missed. Speakers should be brief better - I got the impression that some of the speakers thought that we do not know anything about Marketing / Communication / Branding etc. Speakers should be made aware that we are experts in our field - Content should be relevant - Content should be practical

Well done Unizulu

The committee needs to get a better selection of dynamic presentations, possibly even international speakers