

Maximizing Conference Impact with Advanced Abstract Management Solutions

How abstract management systems play a vital role in the success of conferences and academic events by ensuring high-quality content.

Executive Summary

Conference organizers and planners are charged with a seemingly impossible feat. The event industry as a whole is experiencing slight declines in average attendance – approximately 1.2 percent, according to Trade Show Week Magazine's Quarterly Report for Q1, 2008. Yet, in spite of this decrease, they must somehow find ways to attract a high volume of attendees by differentiating their event from the hundreds – or even thousands – of others out there.

The best way to accomplish this is through the creation of speaker presentations, educational sessions, and other conference content that is as relevant, informative, and compelling to audience members as possible. By developing this kind of agenda, conference planners can lend credibility to their event, boosting its image and reputation, while demonstrating clear value to potential attendees.

But, identifying the right speakers, enticing them to submit high quality abstracts, then managing those proposals throughout long, complex review and acceptance cycles can be a time-consuming, labor-intensive and error-prone process.

How can conference organizers ensure superior conference content, while optimizing productivity and cost-efficiency?

This paper offers readers insight into innovative and exciting ways to maximize the impact of conferences and events. It highlights the key issues today's conference organizers face when it comes to abstract management. It also provides an overview of automated abstract management software solutions, and discusses how they can help address the most pressing challenges and obstacles when it comes to proposal submission, review, and handling.

Readers will receive valuable advice about what features and capabilities to look for when evaluating and selecting an abstract management solution. And finally, they'll learn about *VS Review™*, today's most comprehensive and robust – yet easy-to-use and economical – system for abstract collection, review, management, and publishing.

The Abstract Management Challenge

The job of a conference organizer may seem simple. Whether they work for a university, research institute, professional association, or conference planning firm, their primary goal is develop a program that will demonstrate clear and significant value to members of the target audience, and compel them to attend.

But, today's attendees have hundreds – or even thousands – of events to choose from. And, the primary reasons behind their participation, as well as their expectations, are changing dramatically.

According to Ed Rigsbee, a renowned expert in trade association conferences, and author of *The Art of Partnering*, "golf and partying is not their motivation, but rather a desire to obtain new strategies, tactics, and the skills necessary to improve their business."

In order to make their conference as successful and memorable as possible, and to boost repeat attendance at future events, planners must take the needed steps to ensure the creation of a comprehensive agenda that includes presentations and other educational sessions that are informative, interesting, and relevant to target audience members.

Many event planners are challenged to identify and attract the right speakers, and encourage them to submit high-quality abstracts. Additionally, the peer-review process poses a huge administrative burden, as it is often manual, time-consuming, and "paper-heavy" in nature. Countless submitted proposals must be sifted through, read, discussed, and evaluated in order to find the ones that will offer the most value to attendees.

Without the right processes and supporting technologies in place, it can be extremely difficult for organizers to efficiently and cost-effectively select the best submissions, and ensure that they adhere to the highest professional, research, or academic standards.

Enhancing Abstract Submission, Review, and Selection from End-to-End

To overcome these challenges, many conference organizers are turning to abstract management technologies. These powerful solutions streamline and automate all key tasks and activities involved in the entire process. As a result, they provide a rapid, simple, and productive way for meeting planners to:

- Invite and collect potential abstracts
- Determine which ones are the most relevant
- Accept those that best fit the overall theme of the conference
- Compile them into a complete and compelling agenda
- Publish the program for marketing and promotion purposes

"The simple addition of an online abstract submission system offers a number of benefits, including increased efficiency in the abstract submission and scheduling process, reduced staff time, lower costs, improved member service as a result of the ability to almost instantaneously communicate with those submitting proposals, and the added ability for members in different countries to have the same time frame to

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submit their proposals as domestic members.”, according to an article published by Association Management and authored by Katherine Mandusic Finley and Anne Boley from the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action.

With an abstract management solution in place, conference organizers can:

- Increase the number and quality of valid proposals by providing potential presenters with an intuitive environment for submitting their abstracts
- Boost satisfaction by providing attendees with content that offers the most value and impact
- Optimize the productivity of administrative staff by automating and accelerating the manual processes required for review and acceptance
- Improve event attendance through enhanced image, reputation, and value
- Reduce overhead costs through more efficient event planning

And, in a recent International Conference and Convention Association (ICCA) newsletter, MCI Group, a leading firm that provides event engineering services, cites reduced room for error as one of the key benefits of abstract management software. “Only the abstract author could make an error, as authors enter their submissions directly online, ensuring the greatest accuracy. If a paper-based system is utilized, the author is not the only person documenting his abstract, as an organization's staff would have to process the abstract.”

The use of an abstract management system benefits all those involved. Submitters can leverage a user-friendly interface through which they can quickly and easily author, enter, view, and edit their abstracts, then track the status of acceptance or rejection. Reviewers can carefully read and score submissions, as many times as needed. And, administrators can streamline the entire peer review process, improving the way they handle submissions, assign and oversee reviewers, accept or deny submissions, allocate presentation slots, and generate conference agendas and related documentation.

Additionally, an abstract management solution can help organizations to promote fairness and consistency in abstract review and consideration procedures. So, all submissions are evaluated based on truly objective criteria.

What to Look for When Choosing an Abstract Management Solution

Making the decision to implement and utilize an abstract management package is a wise one. But, finding the right solution can be confusing, particularly for those conference planners that have limited experience in software evaluation and purchase.

There are numerous abstract management products and tools on the market to choose from. But, not all are created equal. When evaluating the various applications and vendors that are available, conference organizers should look for the following features and capabilities:

- Ease of use;
- Simplified administration;
- Flexibility;
- Minimized technical complexity; and
- Proven power, performance, and reliability.

The following qualities are discussed in more detail in the sections below.

Ease of Use

Potential presenters who get frustrated during complex submission processes are likely to abandon their efforts. In order to entice the top speakers to send in their proposals, the abstract management solution you choose must be easy to access and use.

For example, the user interface must be simple and intuitive, and submitters should be able to post their abstracts at any time, and from any convenient location. This, in turn, will encourage a greater volume of high quality submissions.

According to Dave Lutz, Managing Director of Velvet Chainsaw, an advisory firm for the meeting and events industry, "you want a way for people to go online and submit all of the required elements, submit the information, and receive immediate feedback that 'yes it has been received'".

Additionally, the system you select must also be intuitive for reviewers – allowing them to simplify and enhance the entire consideration process, without having to learn and navigate complicated or confusing features.

Simplified Administration

Those who oversee conference planning must juggle a variety of cumbersome and labor-intensive responsibilities. Therefore, an abstract management solution must deliver a completely integrated suite of tools that helps to automate and improve all facets of abstract collection and peer review, empowering administrators with a single, fully centralized solution for efficiently assigning, managing, and tracking all related tasks activities.

Lutz added that "a lot of it is having a great catcher's mitt, so you can collect and manage abstracts in an efficient way".

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Flexibility

Abstract management needs, and the processes that support them, will vary greatly from one organization to the next. The way a university or research society gathers and processes possible presentation proposals will likely be quite different from the way a professional conference planning firm handles similar activities.

Therefore, the vendor you choose should provide a solution that conforms to and enhances your existing procedures (even unique or multi-faceted ones), not forces you to completely re-vamp them to fit the way the system operates.

Minimized Technical Complexity

Conference organizers need to focus their attention on core meeting planning activities. They don't have the time to devote to long implementations, extensive user training, or troubleshooting software or hardware issues. Therefore, they need an abstract management solution that eliminates technical hassles, while ensuring high system performance and accessibility.

Proven Power, Performance, and Reliability

Whether you expect 50 submissions or 5,000, your abstract management solution should be able to efficiently and reliably handle any quantity, with no impact to performance or availability.

Without the power to handle peak submission volumes, potential presenters may find the system unavailable when they attempt to submit their abstracts, which can discourage them from trying again at a later time. And, reviewers who experience system performance problems will experience delays in the acceptance and rejection process, which can further frustrate submitters.

Maximum Affordability

Meeting planners expect moderate budget increases of just 11 percent on average over the next year, according to the 2008 Future Watch Study conducted by Meeting Professionals International. And, as hotel and other expenses continue to rise, conference planners need an abstract management solution that is economical, yet delivers rapid return on investment.

Additionally, an abstract management system should be affordable enough for not only large conference organizers, but smaller ones as well, who strive to achieve the same productivity benefits, but have limited funds available for expensive technology acquisitions.

VS Review™: Today's Most Robust Abstract Management Solution

VS Review™ is a powerful, feature-rich, fully-integrated abstract submission management system designed to boost the success of conferences and events. It delivers the advanced technologies conference organizers need to streamline, accelerate, and improve all facets of the abstract management process. From submission and peer review, through acceptance and publishing, *VS Review™* is a comprehensive toolkit that enhances abstract management from start to finish.

VS Review™ is flexible enough to support any type of abstract management need. Whether you're an educational institution, professional association, or conference planning organization looking to manage presentation abstracts; a publication overseeing manuscript and article submissions; or a non-profit or government agency reviewing grant proposals, *VS Review™* can help you increase productivity and cost-efficiency by accelerating all core processes.

Additionally, *VS Review™* can be fully customized to satisfy nearly any unique or specific requirement.

Key VS Review™ features include:

Ease of Use

A highly intuitive, graphical, dashboard-style interface allows submitters, reviewers, and administrations to work in a Web-based environment that is simple and easy-to-use. In fact, *VS Review™* has been called the "easiest abstract system to use" by its customers.

Improved Administrator Control

With *VS Review™*, administrators have greater control than ever before over the entire abstract management process. Integrated tools make it easier for them to process submissions, assign reviewers, determine acceptance status, allocate presentation slots, and publish conference documentation. So, productivity is dramatically enhanced, and more time can be spent on other critical event planning activities.

Flexible Submission Options

Submitters can send in text-only abstracts, or include graphs, word processing documents, and other attachments as part of their proposal.

Objective Review Processes

VS Review™ offers fully validated review criteria that significantly improve scoring objectivity. Additionally, content can be presented in a blinded fashion, to further promote fair competition.

Status Tracking

All relevant statistical information, including the number of submissions received and reviewed, as well as the scores and accept/reject status of each, can be monitored by administrators at all times. Status reports can even be automatically delivered to their email inboxes. And, submitters can instantly access the status of their submissions once the results are released.

Customizability

VS Review™ can be tailored to meet many different needs. Pull-down menu options, labeling of standard data collection elements, fields, and review criteria are all customizable, providing each client with a solution designed to address their exact requirements.

Security

VS Review™ includes security features that preserve the privacy of information. All submissions, including attached files, are automatically scanned for viruses, while industry-accepted standards are utilized to prevent unauthorized access to data.

Data Export

Administrator can easily export submissions into "print-ready" formats for inclusion in journals, proceedings, and other conference documentation. The order in which the data (submission ID, title, author, abstract text) is exported, as well as the font stylings, orders, and groupings can be easily defined by the user.

To ensure maximum benefit and continuous success with the *VS Review™* system, all customers receive superior, responsive, and professional service and support. Our Knowledgeable, skilled, and courteous staff is on hand to answer questions and address issues as needed.

And, best of all, *VS Review™* is economical and cost-effective. Flexible pricing structures fit virtually any budget, whether you're planning a large conference that generates thousands of submissions, or organizing smaller events that garner just a few dozen abstracts. Special pricing is also available for universities and other academic institutions.

Find Out More

VS Review™ is designed and developed by VS Communications Inc., a leading provider of innovative software solutions for information management. Other VS Communications offerings include applications for research survey management and personalized Internet portals.

Find out how *VS Review™* can boost the impact of your conferences and events. Visit our Web site at www.vsreview.com for additional product information, to schedule an in-depth demonstration, or to sign up for a *risk-free* trial evaluation.

Contact Us

Please visit the *VS Review™* website at <http://www.vsreview.com>

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