

TESL ONTARIO CONFERENCE 2010

TECHNOLOGY FAIR REPORT

Prepared by:
Sharon Rajabi
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Layout

As in previous two years, the conference was held at the Sheraton Centre, down town Toronto. Technology Fair 20109 was located in the Essex Ballroom for the lab and Windsor room for presentation. This year, we rented 58 laptops (equipped with wireless network cards) from D.E. Systems who provided us with the lowest quote. This included 3 spares-in case some were not operational. All other AV needs including data projectors were rented from AV Canada. A sophisticated image and sound system was setup in the grand ballroom to ensure that the audience can see and hear the speakers at all times.

As in previous years, Valentin and Eduard-our two on-site technicians –were available exclusively for Tech Fair and AV Canada sent four technicians to oversee the overall conference needs and to ensure that glitches were dealt with promptly and did not interfere with the presentations.

As a result, we were able to setup a wireless lab, the latest application software packages to offer hands-on sessions at the conference using wireless technology and Internet connectivity. We placed a total of 50 laptops, headsets, a data projector, routers, and cords for setting up the wireless lab. Because of the size of the room, we were able to setup additional chairs and tables to accommodate more participants.

The presentation room which was equipped with a laptop, data projector and Internet connection offered demonstration style presentations and workshops. As mentioned above we also provided laptop and data projectors for the symposia sessions, Panel presentation and the plenary sessions.

To ensure security, the laptops were all equipped with locks. The hotel issued access cards to Tech Fair staff for the duration of the conference. Even the cleaning crew were not admitted to this room until Saturday afternoon. A water station was setup outside the room.

Vendor Selection

The following vendors placed their bids for the provision of equipment:

Vernon
CCR Solutions
DE Systems
AV Canada

D.E. Systems was selected as the successful contractor.

During the summer, some modifications were made to the original estimate as the needs arose. A call for a 2-year tender was placed early September by Conference Planner. Ongoing communication with the conference planner ensured all the needs such as additional software uploading and peripherals (headsets and mics) that were requested by presenters were incorporated. On-going communication with the technicians took place to finalize issues re: equipment drop off and setup time; pick up and teardown.

In addition, the following specifications were included in the call for proposals:

Specifications for laptops

1. 58 Notebooks CDRW/DVD, Wireless
2. external mice
3. WIN 7, Office 2007 Acrobat Reader 7.0 or higher ;
4. Google Chrome
5. Headsets
6. USB cables for remote controls for data projectors
7. Install all plug-ins (flash, ActiveX, Adobe, ...)
8. Install 2 browsers: IE & Firefox
9. Complete multi media enabled system
10. Cables to connect data projectors to MACs

Pre-Conference meeting with Hotel staff

On October 18th, 2010, we attended a pre-conference meeting with all the stakeholders on location. This proved to be most useful as it provided opportunities for everyone to bring up issues, ask questions and get to know one another. Specifically, issues relating to the connectivity speed in Essex Ballroom was discussed. Sheraton ensured that the infrastructure upgrades they have undergone will adequately address the connectivity issues.

Wednesday October 27th, 2010

Sheraton notified us that Essex Ballroom would be available after 6 pm. We arranged to meet the team at the hotel. Areas of responsibility, procedures and communication channels were discussed and established. This year the laptops were set up by the vendor, but our team tested the Internet connection, and the links. Again, we had to purchase drops per station and were not allowed to use routers to share Internet connectivity; hence higher costs. The room was wireless enabled which made the technician's job considerably easier since no cabling was required. We then met with the conference planner team to go over procedures and signage at the hotel.

Conference days: in general, the operations went smoothly. Hands-on and presentation style sessions were well attended. The communication channels that had been set up between the Tech Fair team, the conference planner, and the hotel worked smoothly. The technicians checked the equipment daily at the beginning of the day and attended to glitches promptly.

On-line Registration

The Conference Book and Tech Fair sessions along with session changes were posted online and updated daily on the TESL Ontario web site. Other information such as directions to the hotel and web casting was also posted. As sessions became full, they were closed and became unavailable to on-line registrants. Even with a bigger lab, the hands-on sessions were full.

Type and Variety of Workshops

The participants enjoyed a wide range of workshops and a high calibre of presentations. Online activities were prevalent amongst the workshops presented. The participants attended a myriad of sessions: hands-on workshops as well as research sessions on wireless and Web 2.0 technologies.

Other presentations included new educational software, the use of the Internet as a teaching resource, and classroom activities for all levels. A number of presentations addressed the new LINC Learning Objects and online Repository which were very well attended. The Technology Fair sessions were fully booked during the 3-day event.

Attendance and Presentations

Most of the presentations were conducted in a professional manner. Almost all presenters arrived well before their presentation time. No presentation was cancelled. Some presenters collected email addresses to forward handouts electronically to those who did not receive them during the presentations.

Tech Fair Evaluation

As in last year, the evaluations were conducted online with the conference evaluation. The evaluation summary results will be sent to us by the conference planning team.

Volunteers

Volunteers were exceptionally helpful with handout distributions and delegate admissions. Their duties included watching over the lab, door monitoring, and reporting technical problems to the technician. In addition, Kevin O'Brien was available to assume volunteer duties when needed.

Glitches and Issues

In general everything went smoothly. All minor glitches that came up were promptly dealt with mostly by Kevin, Valentin, and Eduard. Our Tech Fair technicians proved to be invaluable to the conference once again as they did not hesitate to extend assistance to the entire conference, when and where a need was identified. As always, there was ongoing demand from non Tech fair presenters for assistance, software upload, etc. This was a complimentary service for those presenters who had not requested this service at the time they had put their applications in.

However, the bandwidth was considerably improved and Essex Ballroom enjoyed a fast connectivity speed.

Below is a list of improvements for 2011 conference:

1. Reminders to presenters who need software upload to send requests no later than a week before conference.
2. Better communication to presenters re software/file submission: presenters must send all files 2 business days before conference.
3. Include session codes on tech fair chart.
4. If presenters are referring to own websites, a reminder to them re capacity for 51 access points (so as not to jam access as 51 people will be connecting to the same site at once).
5. Need to know the # of hard of hearing participants to reserve seats for.
6. Presenters to bring backup of presentation on stick as well as sending us in advance.
7. Similar to tech fair chart, a chart listing all non tech fair sessions which request Internet & laptop.
8. Any rooms outside the lab area should have wired access.
9. The rooms with webcasting should have 2 drops.
10. Setup & test all drops wed evening.
11. Request that all setup be done as per event planner's resume.
12. Consider 10 extra access points above and beyond the # of laptops.
13. Put all browser shortcuts on desktops.
14. Make sure cookies are enabled.
15. Privacy security setting should be set on " low".

Conclusion

All in all, I feel that the Fair was very successful. The system did not fail and the Internet connectivity was three times faster than in previous years. The lab was beautifully setup and impressed everyone who entered it. A number of presenters expressed gratitude after their presentations went smoothly. The participants enjoyed the range of software and workshops available to them.

The success of the fair was due to the quality of equipment and dependency on knowledgeable and professional individuals who made this event a success. The setup on Wednesday evening indicated that the system was reliable and backup plans in place confirmed the experience and knowledge of the setup team. As always, Kevin O'Brien was an invaluable asset to this event.

Moving Forward

This was the last year that our team managed the Tech Fair. As of next year, the administration of Tech Fair will be in the capable hands of our even planner, Stefanie Wolf, who has competently managed the entire conference in the past two years. She has stated that she will continue to work with Valentin and Eduard who have provided excellent technical support in the past years.

On a personal note, I have immensely enjoyed my time as the Tech Fair Chair; found the opportunity rewarding and the challenges a great learning experience.

Thank you TESL Ontario for your trust in our team.