TESL Ontario Conference 2011

TECHNOLOGY FAIR REPORT

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Layout

The conference –in its fourth year-was once again held at the Sheraton Centre, downtown Toronto. Technology Fair 2011 was located in the Essex Ballroom for the lab and Windsor room for presentation. This year, the conference Event Manager took over all aspects of rentals and recruitment of technical support. She rented 54 laptops (equipped with wireless network cards) from D.E. Systems who had won the tender in 2010 for two years and proved competent last year. All other AV needs including data projectors and screens were rented from AV Canada who -similar to D.E. Systems- had won the bid in 2010 for two years. A sophisticated image and sound system was setup in the grand ballroom (for plenary and dinner) to ensure that the audience can see and hear the speakers at all times.

This year, Valentin was not able to join the team of technical support. Eduard -who was able to commit- and Angel from D.E. Systems provided the onsite support of the Tech Fair.   AV Canada provided technicians to oversee the overall conference needs and to ensure that glitches were dealt with promptly and did not interfere with the presentations.

The wireless lab was setup in early afternoon on Wednesday Oct 26th along with the latest application software packages to offer hands-on sessions at the conference using wireless technology. A total of 50 laptops were setup along with headsets, a data projector, routers, and cords for setting up the wireless lab.

The presentation room which was equipped with a laptop, data projector and Internet connection offered demonstration style presentations and workshops. As in previous years, laptops and data projectors were provided for the symposia sessions, Panel presentation and the plenary sessions and other sessions as per presenter request.

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

D.E. Systems and AV Canada had won the tender in 2010 for two years as the successful contractor for this event who provided us with the equipment and services for the TESL Ontario Conference 2011.

Specifications for laptops

1. 54 Notebooks CDRW/DVD, Wireless
2. External mice
3. WIN 7, Office 2007 Acrobat Reader 7.0 or higher ;
4. Google Chrome
5. Headsets

6. Remote controls for data projectors
7. Plug-ins (flash, ActiveX, Adoebe, …)
8. 2 browsers: IE & Firefox
9. Complete multimedia enabled system
10. Cables to connect data projectors to MACs

Pre-Conference meeting with hotel staff

On October 18th, 2011, we attended a pre-conference meeting with all the stakeholders on location to provide opportunity for all to discuss issues, ask questions and get to know one another. Specifically, issues relating to the connectivity speed in Essex Ballroom were discussed. Sheraton ensured that the infrastructure upgrades they have undergone will adequately address the connectivity issues.

Wednesday October 26th, 2011

The Essex Ballroom was made available for setup as of 12 pm. The vendor was contracted to setup the laptops and the technicians tested the connectivity, the links, speed, and uploaded presentations. When I arrived, the room was setup but the speed was incredibly slow. The technicians informed me that the hotel had allocated one bandwidth to Essex ballroom instead of the requested 2, which made the connection very slow. Sheraton denied having received this request and Stefanie was trying to sort it out. In the end, Sheraton acknowledged that the error was on their part and gave us 2 bandwidths. We then split connectivity between the 2 bandwidths which improved the speed considerably. Once the lab was setup, areas of responsibility, procedures and communication channels were then discussed and established. AV Canada was to setup their screens later that evening. We then met with the conference planning 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. One presentation which had a repeat session encountered a glitch. The presenters had intended a hands-on session for their website which couldn't be accessed because it froze numerous times. It turned out that their website was on a very small server that could not handle the volume in the lab. As a result, they demonstrated via the head table screen. This proved to be disappointing for the participants. A few reserved seats were allocated to the deaf and hard of hearing in the front of the room next to presenter.

Type and Variety of Workshops

The participants enjoyed a wide range of workshops and a high calibre of presentations and had access to a myriad of sessions: hands-on workshops as well as research sessions on

wireless and Web 2.0 technologies. The Technology Fair sessions were fully booked during the 3-day event.

The following is a list of the sessions offered:

> Tutella.ca: An Online ESL/FSL Repository and Community
> Working with ROLLR.ca (Repository of Online Language Learning Resources)
> Practical Web 2.0 for TESL Materials Preparation
> PowerPoint Presentations in the Classroom
> PowerPoint for Educators
> LearnIT2teach Stage 1 Instructor Training
> LearnIT2teach Stage 3 Instructor Training Orientation
> LearnIT2teach for LINC Administrators
> HARTs: The Integrated Solution for Today's Settlement Services
> Online Resources for TESL
> Show me! Enhanced feedback through screencasting technology
> Online Self-assessment on ESL: DIALANG.
> Learner Hill - Learning Made Easy
> The Tele-Language Training Project: Language and Communication through Videoconferencing
> Success with Online Tools for Teaching ESL Writing

Tech Fair Evaluation

A link to the conference evaluation page was sent to all delegates early November. The evaluation summary results will be sent by the conference planning team.

Volunteers

A considerable number of volunteers came from the TCDSB's ELT and TESL training programs.   In general, the volunteers were exceptionally helpful with door monitoring and reporting technical problems to the technician.

Glitches and Issues

In general everything went smoothly. All minor glitches that came up were promptly dealt with by Eduard and Angel. Once again, our technicians proved to be invaluable to the Tech Fair. AV Canada provided technical assistance for all other sessions. As always, there was ongoing demand from other conference 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. Yet our technicians were able to accommodate all requests.

The second bandwidth considerably improved the speed and Essex Ballroom enjoyed a fast connectivity speed.

The improvements listed in 2010 report were fully implemented. Despite this, there were other glitches that was discussed at our debriefing session on Saturday Oct 29th. Below is a list of recommendations for 2012 lab setup:

1. Plug-ins were missing for Firefox; Vendor to include this in their image
2. Presenters should extend timeout login if they are asking that their web page be opened on all laptops ahead of their presentation which may cause timeout in the middle of their presentation.
3. Websites on small servers cannot handle volume (e.g. Tutela.ca): presenters should test volume ahead of their presentation on 50 computers.
4. SAT session on Saturday also had similar server issues as in #3.
5. Participants expected help with content (e.g. learning PowerPoint). So presenters should have volunteer helpers and not rely on technicians to help with their presentation.
6. Have a backup plan e.g. in case a website doesn't work.

Conclusion

All in all, I feel that the Fair was very successful. The connectivity speed was adequate. The lab setup was impressive. 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 afternoon indicated that the system was reliable and backup plans in place confirmed the experience and knowledge of the setup team. Stefanie did a fabulous job of setting up the Technology Fair.