

"Senior executives of power supply companies were told be 'in command on the spot.'"

• John Goss, page 10

Confessions of a conference junkie

By Joel Laykin, Secretary General, Independent Power Producers Forum (IPPF)

PERSPECTIVE



It's been said by some wags that the hot air produced at the plethora of energy and power conferences in Asia could easily melt all the ice sculptures in Harbin.

Since the founding of the IPPF in Dec 2000, we have been immersed if not submersed in the pan-Asian conference scene. Our members speak at and chair a large portion of these events.

We personally participate with conference organisers from planning, speaker recruitment and program content, to chairing, moderating and presenting opinions and commentary on a wide range of energy and power subjects.

The IPPF's internal functions are just that – intimate, informal and inter-active gatherings in the form of 'power lunches' and 'power pow-wows' sponsored by invitation only events. It also includes members only retreats and weekend gatherings at exclusive resorts.

Now, after eight years of such exclusivity the IPPF is about to produce its' very own open conference on top of an exhibition platform. If it's successful, we will probably do this annually.

The IPPF has built comfortable relationships with just about every energy conference organiser operating in Asia. We've learned a lot and for those of you who are involved as attendees, speakers, sponsors, organisers, etc., we will share some observa-



The Independent Power Producers Forum (IPPF) at POWER-GEN ASIA, Bangkok, 2007

tions about the energy and power conference scene.

It is our sincere belief that in general these conferences, seminars and workshops are very important and are becoming more so in the rapidly escalating wave of energy technologies, regulatory reform and related issues of global warming, climate change, energy efficiencies and most importantly energy security.

That being said, what follows are comments about the good, bad and ugly, but without names.

Veterans of the conference scene may recognise who we are referring to but we do not wish to show too much favouritism when handing out accolades and do not wish to hurt feelings when commenting on casual incompetence or outright stupidity.

Our conference partners range from the biggest on the planet to small boutique organisers and we wish to treat all those that partner with the IPPF with respect and equality.

Content and Theme

The idea is information and valued insight from people who know. We think it's a good idea in larger events that separate streams exist for content of a technical nature running concurrently with streams of a strategic or

theoretical nature. The ideal is when the whole attendee mass is brought together before and after at plenaries and at the all important social mixes, breaks and lunches. We have great respect for our partners who go to this effort.

Discipline

The IPPF has built comfortable relationships

Chairs must have the people handling skills to fearlessly control the timing. This is a vital ingredient which is necessary for the networking social breaks to be truly effective also.

All too often, an organiser allows a sponsor to position someone who is slothfully inadequate as an effective chair which is certainly unfair to the speakers and paying attendees.

Networking Neverland

Besides content, the real driver behind the attraction of paying attendees is of course opportunities to network. From the nose-bleed levels of WEC and ADB's Annual

meetings down to focused workshops in Nanning, it's the card exchange that most conference goers lust for.

I personally look forward to a particular organiser's speed networking session which they pull off usually mid-morning on the first or second day of their larger conferences.

Veterans should know who this is and I'll buy lunch for the first three readers who e-mail me the name of the conference organiser (lunch at the FCC in HK is on me, your air fare to Hong Kong is on you).

Listen to your constituency

We are amazed at the volume of conference organisers who dream up topics, agenda and content without listening to the marketplace. The results are often down right silly.

I just chaired an event in Beijing where over half the presentations I was stuck with introducing were woefully redundant with lots of self-serving sales pitches. It was an embarrassment!

We have lots of respect for a particular organiser who goes to great lengths to maintain permanent and continuing advisory boards, empanelled six to seven months before the actual events with executives drawn from key sectors of the energy and power industries.

The "Government" Guys

We are from the government and we are here to take advantage of you...big time! As far as I am concerned most of these free loading cadres, parachniks and hangers-on are a complete waste of time and money.

A few in the PRC for example stand-out as valid communicators on what's happening or should happen in the power and energy sectors.

From an ethical perspective, it's an absolute disgrace that the only way to get a Deputy Director of a PRC government body to show up is to give him cash in his pocket.

To add insult to injury, these government grand pooh-bahs meander in literally minutes before they are supposed to speak, then waltz out with their comfort zone entourage despite the obvious fact that your plenary is packed with pin-stripers dying for an opportunity for a card exchange.

The trick here is to make a firm arrangement to pay the agreed upon fee at the end of the day if not the entire conference.

Sorrytimes up!

In early 2006 we were flown to Abu Dhabi to deliver an important address on alternatives, sustainables and renewables. It was to be a forty five minute presentation and we were scheduled to speak at 4:00pm.

The chairman of my day's session was a bumbling pedantic professor who blithely allowed constant over-runs to the point where I was finally called up at 5:15p.m.

I launched into my 35 minute standup backed by an information packed power-point in front of an expectant audience of 250 people.

By the time I finished my audience was down to 5 Egyptian energy interns, the rest had left to join the party, amazing!