New Types of IEEE Events

I just returned from the IEEE Panel of Conference Organizers (POCO) Conference to find out about IEEE conference services offered by the IEEE and also to find out tips and hints from the various conference organizers at the event. There were about 200 people there from both IEEE technical activities (these are the various IEEE societies, councils, etc) as well as member and geographical activities (MGA, where the regions live).

Region 6 has three conferences that it currently puts on. These are the Conference on Sustainable Technology (SusTech) that will be held in Phoenix, Arizona on October 9-11, 2016. We also will have our 6th Global Humanitarian Conference (GHTC) that will be held near the Seattle airport October 14-16, 2016. Our last conference will be having it's third year at the beginning of January in Las Vegas, CA. The Rising Stars Conference focuses on student members and Young Professionals providing networking and training and an opportunity to meet with people from companies who are looking for technical talent.

The region 6 conferences are different from many IEEE conferences held by societies. Our conference topics span technical disciplines and focus on important social and technical issues as well as student and young engineering training and networking. We do have sessions that provide opportunities for publications but our conferences also include sessions with a broader interest on social problems and may not include publications.

At the POCO conference there were sessions that talked about the developing technology and practice of conferences. These new practices enhance the experience of conferences and allow folks to participate in new ways, even if they can't physically make it to the event. I want to talk about four of these ideas to stimulate new approaches that you may want to use at local events as well as at Region 6 events.

The first idea is to use sensor networks to capture the mood and emotions of the attendees at an event. This can be done in a way that doesn't violate the privacy of individual attendees but does allow the conference organizers and presenters to get immediate feedback on what is working and not working during the event.

The second idea is called Tribalization. This approach uses social networks, games and other approaches to get groups of attendees to form social groups or tribes that interact with each other and enhance the event experience.

The third idea is a content safari. A content safari includes physical movement as well as electronic exploration of content in a non-linear fashion. This approach encourages brainstorming and initially non-judgmental exploration of ideas and activities and can turn an event into an eye opening experience.

The fourth idea is immersive telepresence. This refers to the use of technology that enables remote participation in the event in a much more engaging way than just a webex. Likely this technology requires good internet connectivity to allow people not on site to join in activities. There are various ways to do this including remotely connected robots that an attendee can used as a surrogate for a real physical presence.

However, this remote presence is not the same as actually being at the event. Event organizers may hope that if folks who can't come in person one year can have a positive remote experience they may be inclined to come in person the next year.

Conferences, colleges and other ways that people interact and teach each other are undergoing dramatic evolution with the assistance of modern technologies. If we are to benefit from these new technologies and find ways to create communities and education for the 21st century we need to learn about them and try them out, looking for ways that we can make truly engaging events that draw people to them and help us use our technologies for the benefit of humanity and in particular, our IEEE community.

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