

CONFERENCE MANAGEMENT USING THE Web-CMS

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ABSTRACT

The Web-CMS (Conference Management System) has been used by a number of organizations to manage professional academic conferences, including this one. It is a work in progress and constantly evolving into an even more powerful management information system. The session is intended for prospective program chairs and track chair who would benefit from a personal introduction to the system.

INTRODUCTION

The Web-CMS is an outstanding solution to the management of academic professional conferences. These conferences are typically comprised of research presentations of newly developed enhancements to theory, applications of theory to the solution of practical problems and pedagogical developments, where the research has successfully passes a blind peer review process. An internet-based management system is appropriate because submissions arrive from around the world electronically; they are reviewed by experts that may reside in foreign lands; and the conference schedule itself is assembled by a team of people, who are typically not in geographic proximity.

The submissions are normally categorized into tracks or subject areas, and subdivided into presentation sessions of two to four presentations. The sessions are staffed with session chairs and discussants, who have the opportunity for an in-depth review of a submission prior to the beginning of the conference.

The conference itself is typically organized by track, and the presentation sessions are assigned presentation times that enhance the conference participant's ability to see much of what is happening in his or her specialty subject area. The presentation sessions are interspersed among other activities, such as networking opportunities provided by continental breakfasts, coffee breaks, luncheons and receptions, or organizational events, such as board meetings.

A well-run conference will have a printed *Program* and a website that mirrors the contents of the *Program* that is made public at least one month before the conference. If done effectively, these materials will allow an attendee to quickly identify any personal commitments during the conference, and easily identify additional sessions and events that he or she would like to attend. Since a person can only be one place at a time, it is obvious that a successful schedule has no schedule conflicts.

In addition, there is normally a *Proceedings* publication that is distributed at the meeting, most commonly on a CD. The *Proceedings* also must be logically organized, and typically contains much more detailed reports of the research being presented. A fully complete *Proceedings* CD should also document the conference itself by including important parts of the *Program*.

THE Web-CMS

The Web-CMS is tailored to assist organizations and their program chairs to consistently produce outstanding conferences that meet the challenges above. A major key to success is careful management and processing of program data. A second major key is a user interface that is easy to understand and otherwise transparent.

The interface centers around a browser screen called the Desired Action screen, where clickable buttons are presented to accomplish the various tasks the user might like to perform. A prime element in its design is that the only buttons that appear are relevant and the buttons are organized into topical groups. For example, if a user has not submitted something, there will be no buttons to allow editing of a submission. Similarly, buttons needed by the Program Chair only are not visible to a Track Chair or other participant.

The system provides for upload of PDF submissions of papers or paper proposals, and proposals for panels, tutorials and workshops for blind review. The Program Chair or Track chairs can assign reviewers to the submission. After assignment, a reviewer will have a button presented to download the submission and another button to submit a review with recommendations.

Perhaps the most serious problem facing a Program Chair intending to publish in a formal publication information submitted over the web is incorrect capitalization. In absence of a system to assure proper capitalization of submitted titles, names and addresses, much of the submitted work has to essentially be retyped. The Web-CMS will not let a submitter proceed until proper capitalization has been achieved.

After reviews have been received the Program Chair or Track Chair can set flags for accept/reject. Acceptance noted by a Track Chair is normally considered to be a recommendation. The web system can then send out accept/reject notice e-mails in batches.

Either party can then form sessions by assigning papers of similar subject, provide a suitable title and staff with a Session Chair and some number of Discussants. Most organizations assign one Discussant to each paper, so the responsibility to report a critical analysis is clear. However, Discussants can also be treated as having been assigned to the session as a whole.

The Program Chair assembles the array of time slots (day, time, room) that define available presentation times for sessions, as well as time slots for scheduled events, such as registration periods, coffees, etc. Each time slot has designations that allocate the space to the intended purpose only. In other words, a session cannot be assigned to a time slot intended for an organizational meeting only or an event, and visa versa.

Given the current state of development of the Web-CMS, this is the point at which the information is downloaded from the web into a PC-based CMS to actually do the scheduling of sessions into time slots, identification and removal of schedule conflicts and preparation of the conference materials.

For more detail and the capabilities of the Web-CMS coupled with the CMS, please visit <http://www.ConferenceMgt.com>.