

BEHIND THE SCENES of the 19th INTL MICROSCOPY CONGRESS Sydney ICC Sept 2018

Thursday 13 September 2018

Event Location: Sydney International Convention Centre (ICC)

In September 2018, Sydney and the International Convention Centre played host to the 19th International Microscopy Congress (<http://imc19.com/>). Held over 6 days with a preceding 4 days of around-the-clock bump-in required, the event organising committee (made up of volunteers) together with one of Australia's leading conference organisers, Arinex, managed to deliver an exceptional event worthy of a review. 4+ years in the making, there were over 2,100 delegates, 1000 speakers, 12 concurrent sessions and a whole lot more....it was a BIG event by anyone's standards.

We recently joined a behind-the-scenes tour of the event to learn more about how they 'put on' one of the biggest science conventions to be hosted in Sydney this decade. We were impressed with what we learnt and have put together four key take-aways which we know were instrumental in the success of this event.

Plan big and Set Clear Goals

In one of the first planning meetings for this event they decided to set a list of goals they would like to achieve – or at the very least aim for. At the time it was suggested that it would be "pretty cool" if they could have a Nobel Laureate attend.

In the early stages of planning they took the time to map out their purpose, to be clear on, what was important to them as the host nation and what they needed to achieve this (number of sponsors, number of attendees – i.e. clear budget goals).

In short, they made a clear list of objectives and aimed high. The result? They achieved them all. Two Nobel Laureates attended and spoke at the conference, they got more exhibitors and sponsors than expected (leaving them with a surplus budget to throw at catering and extra bump-in days), and they had as many people in the plenary session on day 4 as they did on day 1 (everyone was engaged and happy!).

Market your Event, People Won't Just Turn Up

With four years between each Congress, the Australian Committee did not waste time in starting to market their event. Even before winning the bid, they were actively marketing the event in Australia as part of the process.

After winning the bid, the team attended conferences and events all over the world to encourage people in their industry to invest in attending their event in 2018. They found selling "Australia" as a destination was instrumental to their campaign. While abroad the committee took turns in the Kangaroo suit and gave out 1000's of clip on koalas to prospective delegates, exhibitors and sponsors.

Another very clever marketing tactic was they actively engaged several event ambassadors around the world to help them promote the meeting to their own connections. In return the ambassadors were given discounted registration and a lavish thank you reception during the congress.

Look Outside your Circle

Microscopy isn't a huge field and Vice Congress Chair, Prof. Paul Munroe mentioned that often at events it is the same speakers that everyone knows.

For the 2018 congress they were keen to find ways they could open up the field of people who would engage with the event. This included the range of speakers they invited along, as well as implementing brand-new elements of the congress.

For example, the two Nobel Laureate in attendance were not Engineers of Microscopes, but rather people who had used microscopes to discover the things they were awarded a Nobel Prizes for.

They implemented an exciting new science outreach programme whereby they invited students to the conference to spend a few hours being inspired by the possibilities of Microscopy. Throughout the week school groups were invited to the event to use the microscopes and a VR experience. The aim was to engage students for the future of their industry and encourage an interest in STEM. The programme was heralded a brilliant new initiative for the Congress.

They also offered 50 young scientists at University level an opportunity to attend an unmissable platform to network with experts in their field – including the Nobel Laureates (an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for budding scientists).

And finally, one of the most beautiful elements of the event was an art exhibition they arranged. Wanting to implement elements of Australia's Indigenous heritage in the Congress they invited artists to replicate the rich visual parallels between the representations seen in many Indigenous Australian artworks and the microscopic structures hidden in the natural world.



Use of Technology to Your Advantage

As part of the Microscopy Congress delegates present 'Posters'. Traditionally they have been presented in hard copies, however this year the Organisers worked towards presenting the posters in digital format. This was so well received that future organising committees will continue their legacy of embracing modern technology in ways not used by their industry previously.

Bidding Process

- First bid in 2010 (lost to Prague) then again in 2014 and won it in 2015 for 2018
- Meeting held every 4 years. It was last in Australia was 1974
- BES Role - customised bidding with Paul Monroe (UNSW)
- Knew in 2010 might not win, as hadn't been to Europe in 20 yrs. We then remitted a strong bid in Prague and was up against China, Beijing and Busan. Sydney won on logistics.

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