

### *Using Events to Enhance your Foresight Program: Using an Intelligence Approach (Part 1)*

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Event intelligence is a popular discipline within the intelligence field. Strategic and Competitive Intelligence Professionals (SCIP) publications describe how a company can gather in three days more information from a trade show than can be gathered in a year in other ways.

Why? These are places where key industry players gather to display their current products and services, governments to discuss their programs, and everyone wants to talk.

Similarly, within the foresight field, there are a variety of conferences at which leading practitioners, consultants, government foresight officers and others gather to discuss their foresight programs. Being ready for these events, will produce immense benefits for your event program. And with the next Seville FTA conference being only a few months away (May 2011) there is no time like the present to get ready.

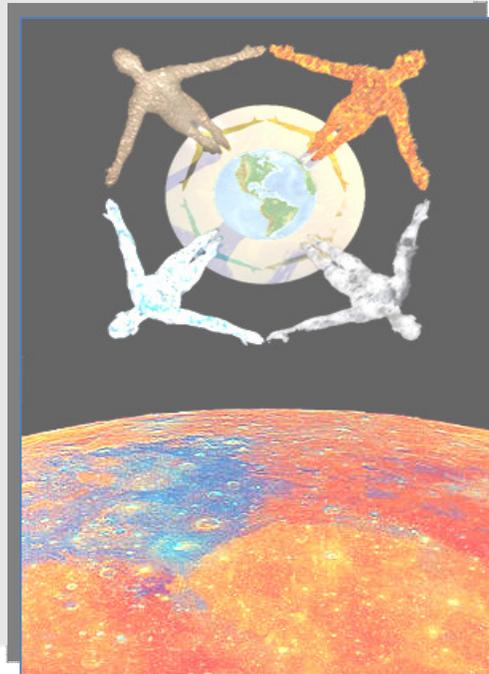
To set the stage for what can be done in the forthcoming Seville FTA conference, the following article describes the process followed for the last Seville conference in October 2008

FTA is a standard two day conference with 180 registered delegates attending any one of 5 concurrent sessions offered several times a day with a few plenary sessions (which

everyone attends), a couple of keynote speeches and two workshops. This event, which is hosted by the Institute for Prospective Technical Studies and sponsored by the European Economic Union (EEU) government, brings together government leaders and practitioners in FTA with corporate and academic practitioners.

On the last day of the event, several participants lamented that although a fun conference to go to, they did not get what they needed from it. "How am I going to explain this when I get back to the office" was a frequent refrain from many people.

These individuals had dutifully sat in sessions that appeared to match their interests but found that the presentations in fact were not what they expected or needed. They also lamented that the conference was almost over and they had not met some of the key people integral to their FTA program success. For the most part, the participants at the FTA conference did not waste their time, they were at the event at all times it was open despite the lure of Seville.



The objective of this article will be to show how the general event intelligence model can and should be applied to symposium and conferences.

Consider the following responses from participants as the starting point for your event intelligence preparations for a trade show or conference.

**1. Did you go over the outline of the program?**

The participants all answered yes, they looked over the session descriptions and chose sessions and events that they felt met their FTA needs.

**2. Did you have an a priori requirement at the event that you used when you went over the outline?**

Again the answer was yes. All had thought about what they needed to get out of the event to help them do a better job. Several had taken the program description and sat down with their boss and others in their organization to also discuss how the event could help the organizations intelligence and FTA needs. They even went so far as to identify presenters that they would like to meet during the event.

**3. Did you go through all pre-event materials before (or even during) the event?**

Many respondents thought going through session descriptions was all that was needed. Many also thought that was all that was available. However, all the session presentations and papers (see exhibits at the end of this article) were posted on the conference web site prior to the event. Why were these materials important? Because a review of these materials will help you assess the value of each session.

**4. Did you contact the people you wanted to meet before the event?**

With the papers and presentations on the conference web site, you would have had their email addresses. Further, similar to a SCIP conference, on the 1<sup>st</sup> day all participants were given a list of who was registered for the event and their contact information. It is so critical to contact people you want to learn

from at these events as perhaps you can get the information you need directly from them. Further, if you want face time with them, you do want to contact them in advance as they may otherwise have booked their available time.

**5. Did you share your plan or needs with others?**

It could help to have their friends help them in their collection efforts especially if they needed to be in two places at the same time or needed an introduction to someone they know. Fortunately, some of the participants that did share their information needs with colleagues at the beginning of the program. This allowed them to establish meetings with the right people. Sharing information needs and interview targets with colleagues at the event builds partnering and sharing of ideas with those who care about your success to help you in executing your plan.

Some of participants were unhappy at the last day of the event? The sessions they went to, while matching by title their information needs, presented little of the material that they required for their intelligence needs. Because the people they wanted to meet, they could not find or if they found them they could not get face time with them or because they did not know who were the right people to meet. In short, although they did plan their time based on session descriptions and they did somewhat review the materials they did not go deep enough. They did not look at all the pre-conference materials.

Needless to say many participants were frustrated with the limited value they derived from participation in the Conference. In the subsequent E- Bulletin we will look at a different strategy which will provide the basis for a more successful outcome.