2011 Wisconsin Sustainable Business Council Conference Report

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Intro-Passing the Torch

The WI Sustainable Business Council Conference is an empowering project that allows students to put their creativity and resources into planning something that makes a difference for our economic and social future. Personal relations, food planning, event orders, sponsor and partner relations, transportation scheduling and information development are some of the skills that students gain from organizing this conference. Our group this year had the opportunity to work with many WI businesses that are leaders in sustainability, such as Johnson Controls, Menasha Packaging, Lands' End and Lakefront Brewery. It's important from day one to showcase why people should come to this conference and learn from these businesses. This was the opportunity in General Business 600 to work extensively with a professor that wants you to succeed in the real world, and provides excellent opportunities like this one to gain new skills and showcase your talents.

Registration and Ticketing

One of the first tasks of organizing the conference was to select a ticketing vendor to sell tickets for the conference. Brown Paper Tickets (which had been used in previous conferences) would be the appropriate vendor for the conference. We considered Brown Paper Ticket's reputation as a fair-trade ticketing vendor and their online system which allowed non-printed tickets to be sold. We recommend the use of Brown Paper tickets for future conferences. A few suggestions include:

- We used Brown Paper Ticket's questionnaire feature to get information regarding session preferences and transportation services (such as busses). Other questions can be added to the questionnaire.
- Get in contact with Brown Paper Tickets before the registration begins. Brown Paper Ticket's service support is more than willing to help with the registration process as the system can be confusing. They can ensure that your registration is up and ready to go on the chosen date and that the information, including dates and times, ticket prices, and final sale details are flawless.
- The previous conference group recommended capturing registrant's company, organization, or school as they register. Brown Paper Tickets has an easy system during the registration process to gather this information.

Pre-Conference Tasks

Sponsors and Partners:

It's important to get a high resolution image of their logo right away from both sponsors and partners; it's really easy to e-mail the person who's in charge of communications because they're listed on the website for that company. To reward the sponsors for their contributions, make sure their logos are included on all items being printed or sent out via email, and on the website in the sponsors page.

The partners should be on educational pieces like the final agenda used at the conference and brochures leading up to it. Once the images are received, upload them to the dropbox (or whatever you use) so that everyone has access. These images will also be beneficial when creating the specific sponsor and partner posters, where it's just their logo that you're going to be using.

Ordering materials:
Materials that are to be used as give-aways for conference attendees should be ordered early to ensure shipment by the conference date. Klean Kanteen took quite long because of their lengthy proofing process. The logo used for imprinting should also be taken into account. Name tags and USB flash drives were imprinted without dates to allow reuse the next year. Any items that are to be representative of the year's conference should be dated. Items we gave to all attendees could be used on the day of the conference. Don't put dates on conference materials that you aren't sure will be used up.

Flash drives containing conference materials, water bottles, notebooks, pens and a copy of "Onward" by Howard Shultz were given to all attendees. Everything purchased was "sustainable" in some way, fair trade, recycled, made in USA or heavily reusable (like steel pens and water bottles).

All items will need a purchase order and receipt sent from the company to allow funding to be sent. Ensure that this is sent early to allow the orders to be printed in time. There was problems with Klean Kanteen sending a purchasing order late which caused delays in water bottle shipment. Consistently work with the individual in charge of funding at the UW Business School and make the purchasing process transparent to allow ease in ordering.

Speaker Gifts:
This year we provided the speakers additional gifts in their conference attendee bag to thank them for speaking. We contacted local Wisconsin businesses via email asking for donations and the opportunity to promote their sustainability message.

This year we included donated items in the speaker bags. I recommend contacting companies earlier to ask for donations. This year we ran into problems that companies had already reached their donation quotas for the year or a month time frame was to short to make donations.

In addition to donated items we also included LED light bulbs and engraved pens. I recommend that if engraved pens will again be used, purchase the pens from the engraver as they have more knowledge about that product and how to engrave or imprint them and will reduce costs.

Designing Conference Brand and Materials

Logo:
Consider any changes to the conference logo as soon as possible, as it should be consistent throughout conference communications that may be done early on. You can edit the .psd file for the logo we used in 2011, and just change it to 2012. Otherwise you can try to get a logo professionally done. Tom could also get this done in the off season so it is ready for the

conference. Two months is not enough time to get a logo designed and incorporated into conference materials and allow a thorough transition. Get venue photos from host to incorporate into promotional materials.

Website:
Use last years as an example. Content manager will probably be different next year, so make sure you get training early (to whoever manages the site).

Work with John Graham, the head of the Business School's website, ahead of time. Try to avoid putting links in the navigation that he will be required to update. Link to pages and manage content in pages, rather than having navigation links go directly to pdfs.

Home page should be updated regularly with new information. There should be a brief conference overview (2 sentences) followed by updated logistical information. Also present at the top of the page should be more compelling reasons for ALL OF YOUR AUDIENCE demographics.

Brochure:
Make sure the brochure is a 2 page flip (Front and back) and not a tri-fold. Always include sponsors and partners logos, updating them constantly. Have the prices included on the front page, and you will have to change the prices when the special price time period has ended. There needs to be an enticing paragraph describing the uniqueness and importance of this conference. Include the keynote speaker, companies that are speaking, logistics for the date, prices and an explanation of the "One Great Idea" session. When the speakers are finalized (or close to it), include them with their sessions on the back page.

Designing Emails:
Uniformity is important; use same "letter head" and update the logos for the sponsors as more sponsors come in. It's not necessary to use partner logos because the e-mail shouldn't be too long. There should be one e-mail sent out per week to everyone (use WUD and their e-mailing services to reach students). We created an "e-mail schedule" that helped us stay on track with presenting the right info at the right time.

Schedule we used (in chronological order): Keynote Speaker, Morning sessions, Afternoon sessions, Info about the Facility and Conference Highlights and Updates.

When asking people to critique what you've written, create a hierarchy of proof-readers: first you, then your fellow conference workers then to Tom and finally to Lloyd Clark (lloyd@clarkwrites.com) or whomever you're using as a Public Relations person.

Pragmatic writing (see email examples) should be clear, concise, and to the point. Links should be obvious.

Posters:

Font: it's ok to use serif and sans-serif fonts on the same poster, but make sure the font is the same for the agenda and brochures too. 2 kinds of posters should be designed pre-conference: a student oriented one and a professional style for Tom to use at other conferences that will be going on before this one. During the conference, there should be 5 types of posters made: sponsor, partner, agenda, morning session and afternoon session. Feel free to make one of a map of your facility too.

Food

Ordering Food:
Start ordering food and asking for donations at the beginning, because the conference happens between 2 major holidays and you need to get your order in ASAP to ensure full cooperation. Many companies had already reached their donation budget for the year or did not have additional product resources to offer. To increases donation possibilities, asking for donations should be one of the first tasks done in October. Stella's Bakery, RP's Pasta and Capital Brewery are great places to ask for donations.

Monona Terrace:
It was expensive to order food through them, because of the "donation handling" fee. Since the location changes every 3 years, this might not be a factor. When planning the menu, have as your entree something that your Mom couldn't make at home; for example, we had butternut squash ravioli. Make sure there is color and variety, and talk to your main cook/food supplier about vegan choices. For food, it should fuel the attendees rather than put them to sleep. For breakfast, offer something sweet, but something healthy too. For the salad, use spinach or romaine and the dressing should be something light. The main dish needs to be vegetarian (it's more sustainable) and make sure there's color.

Network Refreshments:
Order about 15% more than you think you will need, because people are going to be hungry throughout the day and they don't have a break room to go to. For the morning continental breakfast, offer one sugary item and then have fresh fruit available, due to certain allergy scares. Also offer breakfast items (before the conference) that are not sugary, such as bagels with cream cheese. The coffee needs to be fair trade, shade grown and offer it in the morning and afternoon networking breaks. For those that need caffeine but don't like coffee, there should be a soda option.

Marketing: Social Media, Press Announcements, Sending Emails

Facebook:
Post updates at least bi-weekly, more frequently in weeks leading up to conference. Post twice a day week before price increase. Connect with speaker companies and communicate with universities.
Use twitter to connect with schools you are targeting. Tweet incentives like, "networking opportunity" "students interested in sustainability" ect. Always include URL, which you can shorten with http://goo.gl/.

Twitter
Twitter should be used in conjunction with facebook to say pretty much the same things. The benefit of Twitter is it is easier to take advantage of our network. Using @[organization name] to connect with other educational institutions, partners, and individuals.

Note on social media:
One of the goals that we never had a chance to do in 2011 was create a dialogue between attendees over Twitter or Facebook before the conference. Starting early with announcements over email and on the website, you could ask people to tell you what they are excited/aiming to hear about during the conference. This would be especially beneficial with students, because they are on social media a lot.

Sending Emails:
Constant Contact was useful, but consider other options such as Mail Chimp, which might be more simple. Constant Contact only allows you to upload 5 images at a time, so consider this when shopping around. When you're choosing a mode for sending e-mails, make sure that EVERYONE can receive them and that they appears legitimate and not in spam format. The email service you choose should have the ability to display statistics on open rate, rejection rate, and click through rate. It is important to SEE WHO DID NOT RECEIVE EMAILS and re-send them emails directly from the sustain@bus.wisc.edu email address. Some email servers block mass-emails, so it is important to do this or else some contacts will not be in the know.

From the beginning of the project, discuss anticipated conference highlights and themes that can recur in email messages. This could include keynote speaker, location, sessions, past conference highlights, and even the educational aspects. These should be compelling reasons that will make people register.

Send emails out mid-early day of mid week (at like 9) and have them written ahead of time. If you send messages out on Thursday, create a draft on Monday. There are always last minute things to change, especially with links, fonts, updates and images.

In addition to mass email lists that will be provided to you (about 4,500 contacts), We suggest targeting organizations with an interest in student life early on in the marketing process. This includes:

- Presidents of student organizations (WISPIRG, e-Hub, Environmental Studies Club, etc.)
- Heads of sustainability at UW campuses (Stevens Point, Oshkosh, Milwaukee, Eau Claire)
- Professors interested in sustainability (on all UW campuses)

Recruiting several students at the UW to promote the conference would also pay off. You could offer them free admission in return for hanging up posters or announcing the conference to people in their class. This, in conjunction with help from the WUD office, would increase student numbers.

Press Releases:
Three press releases were created over the course of the conference planning. The first press released announced the conference and highlighted what the conference would be about, where it would take place, and the keynote speaker. The second press release announced the morning sessions and featured session titles and companies that were represented at each session. The final press release drew attention to a selection of prominent morning and afternoon sessions and the corresponding speakers and companies. The press releases were sent out to a large list of media outlets 5, 3, and 1 week(s) (respectively) prior to the conference.

Ensure that the press releases appeal to media outlets. The point is to get media to cover your story.

Send press releases from personal accounts. It is also possible to use the WSBCC email account (sustain@bus.wisc.edu) but be sure to keep track of bounce-backs, unopened press releases, and the possibility that inboxes note the email as SPAM.

News outlets:
The use of press releases provided useful in getting contact with Wisconsin media. NBC-15 recorded a two and half segment for the afternoon show in which one of the student organizers appeared on behalf of the Wisconsin Sustainable Business Council Conference. Additionally, radio station WPR Featured the conference in an afternoon broadcast. Suggestions include:

Contact NBC-15 during the course of conference planning as to gain publicity of the conference. Do this within the first few weeks of event planning.

Contact: Carleen Wild, cwild@nbc15.com

Student attendance:
Student attendance at the 2011 Wisconsin Sustainable Business Council Conference was significantly less than previous conference years. The price was increased from last year's $25 to $35. Students who attended the conference would receive a $25 reimbursement via Brown Paper ticket reimbursement. We have a few proposals to increase student attendance for future conferences.

Keep price low and incentivize: $25 with a $15 or $20 reimbursement is an acceptable price and decreases a student's believed risk of not attending. Conference organizers may also consider free student attendance.

Advertise the conference to a student base in the first few weeks of conference planning. Students need to hear of the conference early as to start thinking if they can fit it in their schedules. Continue advertisements on at least weekly basis as to keep the conference in the minds of students. Advertisements can be in the form of posters, brochures, Facebook, twitter, and emails sent to professors and campus organizations. Penetrating various Wisconsin educational institutions is imperative.

Day of Conference

Transportation:
Charter buses were provided for free for attendees from the Fox Valley Area and Milwaukee to the conference. This was done to decrease carbon footprint and provide alternative transportation. The lowest bid was found to be with Lamers who had more buses stationed in our areas of need which decreased pricing. Buses left early in the morning to arrive by 7 am and were scheduled to leave after the reception. These were found unfavorable since they left so early and left so late, which resulted in very low bus numbers. For next year, consider changing the timing to leave later and/or skip reception, and take into consideration how this will affect attendees.

Moderating Breakouts:
When moderating breakout sessions, it's important to keep your speakers within the time frame. Stand in the back and use hand signals to let them know when they have 4, 2, 1 minutes left; the speakers will listen to you and try to speed up. Also, when collecting powerpoint presentations, e-mail your speakers that you need it for the jumpdrive so they're not using up all their talking time reading off a slide. That way, you can gauge how much time they'll take up (and let them know if they need to fix anything). If a speaker looks at you to clarify a question, it's beneficial to take notes about the questions being asked so you can reform the question so it's answerable. It’s not disrecpectful to take notes during a presentation, so take them to clarify questions and to write your session summaries that will be included on the website. Session summaries should be 3 sentences long that describe what attendees would learn about the session as a whole.

Practice addressing speakers by name (pronunciation, title, etc). Practice questions ahead of time, but be aware: it will be necessary to adapt to the material being presented by speakers (since they won't only talk about what you want them to talk about). Also, the audience will express interests early on so be prepared to react to this. Have many questions on several topics prepared. Also, its a long session so keep talking.

Conference recording/ note taking:
Note-taking is especially beneficial for clarifying questions during sessions. You will get that awkward question to which no one will know what's being asked, and it's up to you to clarify it. It will also be extremely difficult to repeat the questions into the mike for recording purposes, so either have several microphones spread throughout the seating area (if your facility has the capacity for it), or interrupt speakers before they jump into their answer (this might be a bad thing because if they have an answer in their mind, they're going to have to wait for you to clarify the question and lose their response). It will be up to your discretion.

Computers:
Rent macbooks from libraries or DoIT (Repair and Desktop service) two days before conference. It is good to have all computers and adapters for video figured out early and set up as soon as you get to venue on day of conference.

Video Cameras:
Rent cameras from DMC. Call and make reservation a month in advance. You can rent many cameras, but they might not be available at short notice. Also, stick with camcorders that have

composite out. This is the red, yellow and white cord on one side and a black aux-like cord on other side. Sonic foundry, the service we used to web-cast can only use composite video feeds.

We sent an email to DMC staff (dmc@wisc.edu) before the conference asking if one of them wanted to work for us, setting up and breaking down cameras. This was a great idea. We also had 3 other camera people to film other breakout sessions. These were people who we knew from outside class. Filming the conference is extremely simple, not much previous filming experience is needed.

Sonic Foundry provided two staffers to handle web-casting. They were very helpful in teaching camera crew how to use the equipment.

Registration:
Registration at the day of the conference should be an easy transition into the conference for attendees. To ensure a valid list of attendees present, they must be marked and given their goody bags. Materials in registration included bag, badge, water bottle, book, USB, agenda, and conference evaluations. Event organizers arrived at Monona Terrace at 6:30 as registration began at 7:30. Attendees began to arrive at 7:00 and registration was not entirely set-up.

<u>A myriad of suggestions include:</u>

Have all badges printed and in alphabetical order prior to the day of the conference. At the registration table, place badges in alphabetical order.

Have a printed list of attendees as they arrive. Make a separate list of speakers and another for exhibitors, sponsors, and partners. This will make it easier for registration workers to guarantee that speakers get speaker bags and exhibitors are marked as present but do not take advantage of "goodie bags."

Enlist a group of volunteers to help with registration. Have one person take names, another to grab bags, and a third to find badges. A fourth volunteer can be on hand to fill in the gaps. Designate positions to decrease confusion in tasks.

A few items may be placed at registration for attendees to pick up on their own. We had books and water bottles on the registration desk. However, do not leave all materials for attendees to pick-up. These materials need to be monitored as to avoid individuals taking more than one object.

Exhibitors:
Sponsors and partners had the option to run an exhibitor table at the conference. Make it clear to them that they are allowed to being a finite number of guests, and these guests are not entitled a goody bag, unless they are also registered for the conference. Depending on Tom's decision, sponsors will be allowed to register a few guests for free, a benefit of being a sponsor.

Carbon Foot printing:

This was not emphasized enough for this year's conference; make sure to include the carbon offsets on brochures and posters. If people understand we are charging the prices we did due to carbon offsets, then they'd be less hostile about the price and more people will sign up.

Other Suggestions

- At the end of the day, find an easy way to collect evaluations and badges. Perhaps have a table near the exit aligned with a separate box for evaluations and badges respectively.
- Double Checking Everything! Before you send an updated e-mail with all your progress, proof-read your own work
- When updating something, make sure it's updated everywhere
- Ask Partners and Sponsors for high resolution images at the beginning when contact is first made
- When ordering food, plan your menu early because if you want to get food donated, you'll need to ask ASAP
- Use WUD (Wisconsin Union Directorate) early
- Work extensively with StudentPrint, that way if there's a discrepancy, they'll be able to reimburse you
- At the end of the day, find an easy way to collect evaluations and badges. Perhaps have a table near the exit aligned with a separate box for evaluations and badges respectively.
- Create more time for networking. According to evaluations, many attendees of this year's conference felt networking breaks were too short. This could be off-set by making passing breaks longer than 15 minutes.
- Consider dietary needs when ordering food. Perhaps consider offering fruit at some point during the day
- Think about how you will moderate sessions ahead of time. Specifically, how will you receive questions from the audience. Moderator may repeat questions, may ask that speakers repeat questions, walk around with a microphone to take questions, or place a microphone in an isle in which attendees with questions may ask questions from.
- Review powerpoints from speakers as they are sent. Make sure content aligns with session topics. Additionally, produce questions based on these powerpoints.
- Consider scheduling a phone conversation with speakers in the weeks prior to the conference day. Speakers do not always read through their emails and may have not fully taken into account all the information sent or understand what is expected of them. A phone conversation will allow conference organizers to make sure all information is shared and understood.
- From the evaluations we received this year, it was made evident that we sent out too many e-mails. So towards the end, don't send out more than 2 because it becomes overwhelming for the attendees.