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BEST PRACTICES GUIDE FOR HIGH-QUALITY CONTENT

10 Tips on Collecting, Reviewing and Managing Abstracts

Gathering content for your event shouldn't be a pain point. An efficient content collection, review and management workflow can help you provide the high-quality content your members deserve!

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INTRODUCTION

Managing the collection and review of conference content is a challenge for many event planners. Whether you collect submissions for your conference manually or through an abstract management system, there are common pitfalls that can cause serious delays in your collection and review processes.

Making seemingly small changes to your process for abstract management can help you avoid these challenges and save you time during your busy event planning schedule. Each of these changes will help solidify a particular aspect of your call for papers, leaving you better prepared to handle content challenges and transform submitted content into your final conference materials.

The rest of this document explains ten simple changes your association can make to your call for papers to streamline your process and mitigate problems during the collection, review and management of your conference content.

BEST PRACTICES

COLLECTING PAPERS AND ABSTRACTS

1. Select the right collection tools

The first step to ensuring your call for papers and abstracts goes smoothly is to find a system that will help you organize the data you will be collecting. Every conference collects content in a unique way, and some tools will fit your association better than others. Unfortunately, many meeting planners skip this step and continue to use an inefficient collection process year after year, simply because they don't realize there is a better way.

To help you find the right system for your event, consider things like: How many abstracts and papers do you expect to be submitted? How large is your event? How much available time and energy do you have to organize and manage submissions?

Smaller conferences often don't require the complexity an online abstract management system provides, so manual tools will likely be manageable—and even preferred—by your staff. If you are collecting 30 or fewer submissions, you might decide to collect and organize them through email and a program such as Excel. If you do require a system to assist you, a low-cost SaaS solution may be the simple, yet functional, tool you need.

For larger conferences with more than 30 submissions, however, you may want to consider using an abstract management system to more effectively collect, review and manage abstracts, papers and other materials. Manually organizing data and communications for more than 30 submissions can become unwieldy.

No matter what tools you decide are appropriate for your organization—whether manual or online—having the correct system in place will help create a much smoother workflow right from the start of your submission process.

DECIDING ON AN ONLINE SYSTEM

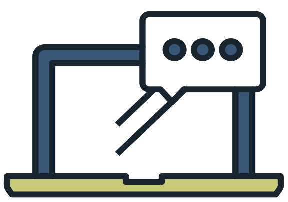
If you decide an online system is better for your process, consider the following during your research and evaluation of different systems:

- The system is easy to use and intuitive
- Forms and fields can be configured for your process
- The system generates reports you need in the appropriate formats
- The administrative portal gives you complete control of the process
- The system can accept a wide variety of file types, from HTML to PDF and video
- You can easily transfer data to the appropriate outputs
- The system comes with appropriate support for your association and submitters

2. Prepare your forms to collect all necessary data

The information collected in your call for papers will be used in a variety of conference materials, including your website, printed program book, mobile app and more. It's essential to finalize all of these outputs and have a clear view of what data you'll need for each before you begin collecting information from submitters. By doing so, you minimize the risk of failing to collect some data. It's much more difficult and time-consuming to collect additional data later in the process—especially if you're under a tight production deadline.

Additionally, work with your vendors to understand what information you need to collect and what file types and formats they require for each output. Ask them for any tools or templates you can use in advance; this can reduce additional costs if the vendor needs to reformat your collected content later.



3. Collect data in small pieces

Attendees consume conference content in many different ways, meaning the information you collect from submitters will have to be flexible enough to meet each format's requirements. To give you the greatest amount of flexibility for formatting and organization, set up your submission fields to collect data in the smallest pieces possible. For example, rather than collecting a user's full name in one field, have separate fields for First Name, Last Name, Suffix, Credentials, etc.

4. Set deadlines earlier than required

It's best practice to assume at least a few submitters will miss their deadlines and want to submit materials after the site has closed. It's also likely that some submissions will be entered incorrectly and will need time to be rectified.

To accommodate for any last-minute submissions, determine all your deadlines ahead of time. Then, develop a working timeline that places deadlines 2-3 weeks earlier than required. This means your call for papers will have two deadlines: the one you advertise to submitters, and the real one.

Remember that 80-90% of your submissions will arrive during the final 72 hours prior to your deadline, so plan accordingly and be sure to have resources available during this time to help your submitters troubleshoot any questions or issues.

By shifting all of your timelines ahead of schedule at the start of your process, you'll have built-in time to address late and incorrect content without affecting the delivery of your conference materials.

5. Test the system before accepting submissions

Unforeseen technical issues with your submission site can cause frustration for submitters and your organization, and can even deter potential speakers. Before you open up your call for papers to submitters, you should conduct a thorough test of the site. The goal of your test will be to discover any trouble spots in the submission process before you receive submissions. Fixing problems before the site opens is much easier than addressing them after you've received submissions.

In order to conduct the best possible test, recruit a diverse group of testers that matches the age range and technical skill level of your typical submitter. Include testers from within your organization, outside of the association and from outside your industry.

Recruiting people from within your association is a great place to start because your employees will be dedicated to the submission system's success, helping identify and solve the largest problem your system might have. Next, test the system with family and friends outside of the organization; this creates a real-life scenario that can help identify other types of issues. Finally, recruit people from outside of your industry entirely. If someone with little to no industry experience can work through your submission process step-by-step, your system is ready to be opened.

BEST PRACTICES

REVIEWING SUBMISSIONS

6. Authenticate data before reviewing

Before you begin reviewing submissions, create a process to validate and authenticate each submitter's content. This ensures all submissions have the best opportunity to be selected and helps mitigate problems with plagiarism early on.

You can quickly determine if there is a problem with a submission if the user hasn't given a copyright release or disclosure or hasn't paid their submission fee.

Taking the time to check for these technicalities before passing submissions off to your reviewers ensures that all submissions have an equal opportunity for selection.

Additionally, there are a variety of free and paid tools available to help you identify plagiarism. Some organizations with more stringent publishing policies require their abstract and paper management systems integrate with industry-leading plagiarism checking software to ensure content integrity is upheld; this may be something you want to consider.

Regardless of how thorough your content authentication process may be, make sure to allocate additional time in your overall collection timeline to account for these issues year long!

ENSURE YOU ARE PUBLISHING ORIGINAL CONTENT

iThenticate is a plagiarism-identifying tool that helps organizations guarantee that the submitters' content is original. iThenticate prides itself on its commitment to not storing, sharing or reselling the papers submitted.

The first step in the checking process is the upload of the document. After the upload, the submitted paper will be compared to a massive database of content to distinguish plagiarism or attribution errors. Within minutes, the iThenticate user will be able to inspect the results of found matched content, unattributed text, and sources. Integrating iThenticate with an abstract management system, like our CATALYST system, can streamline the process.

7. Avoid having too many reviewers

It's important to recruit an appropriate number of reviewers for the number of submissions you expect to receive. Having too few reviewers available can result in a significant time commitment for each individual reviewer. Overloading reviewers often results in incomplete review assignments.

On the other hand, it's important to avoid having too many reviewers as well. When reviewers are assigned only a few papers each, there is less opportunity for them to become vested in the review process. It's also more difficult to communicate with reviewers and track their progress as their number increases.

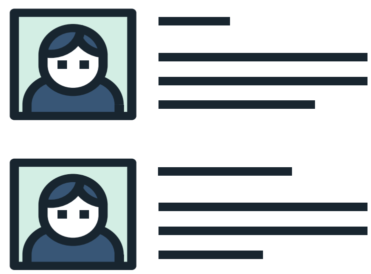
The number of submissions you receive should determine the number of reviewers you recruit. A good practice is to have one reviewer for every 10 abstracts and papers that have been submitted. For example, if you collect 100 papers, you should enlist 10 reviewers.

Giving each reviewer a practical amount of work allows them to be more accountable for their feedback without requiring an unreasonable amount of their time.

8. Recruit more reviewers than you think you'll need

Although you want to avoid having too many reviewers, it's likely that some of the reviewers you recruit will have conflicts, be unresponsive or provide only a fraction of the feedback required.

To avoid being shorthanded, recruit a few more reviewers than you think you'll need at the beginning of your call for papers process. Having the ability to fill any gaps in your reviewing team will ensure your content is properly vetted without any major delays.



9. Avoid "rolling reviews"

Allowing submissions and reviews to happen simultaneously may appear to be a timesaver, but can actually cause more harm than good in your abstract management process. Most of your submissions will arrive just before or after your deadline. This means that you may invite reviewers to provide feedback on a handful of documents to start, only to have to re-invite them later when the rest of the submissions are completed.

Compliance tends to decrease each time reviewers ask to return to the system. Reporting also becomes difficult when you have both review assessments and submissions continually changing. It's recommended that you plan timelines accordingly to fully complete the submission stage, then move on to the review stage.

BEST PRACTICES

MANAGING CONFERENCE CONTENT

10. Create a central location for updated data

It's likely that, between the time your call for papers closes and you submit final materials to your vendors, your conference content will change multiple times. Co-authors might be added, citations changed and so on. Typically, these changes will happen after content has already been pulled out of your submission site, which means the site no longer houses the most current data. This makes managing and tracking updates difficult and time-consuming, particularly if you're providing content to multiple vendors.

To better control future changes to conference content, set up a "database of record"—a centralized location for all content updates. Make this database the only place to save updated content and to pull all files you provide to production vendors. Depending upon the quantity and type of content you have collected, you may want to use an Excel spreadsheet to list all files, links to the final documents or files on your server, date and time of the last update and the nature of the changes.

Additionally, put one single person in charge of controlling the database of record and all changes and communications so the process is consistent and well-managed.

A WINNING COMBINATION

Collecting, reviewing and managing abstracts and papers shouldn't have to be a headache for your association, no matter how large your event is. Implementing a few or all of these changes will help your association avoid the challenges many organizations encounter while collecting content. By ensuring you're using the right tools and putting the proper processes in place, your call for papers can go as smooth as possible, letting you focus your energy on other areas of event planning.

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GREAT CONFERENCES START HERE

Collect, produce and distribute the educational materials that advance your mission.

Let us handle the details of your content so you can focus on delivering an exceptional conference. Omnipress conference services provide a streamlined solution from start to finish. We can develop your online collection site to match your process, make that content searchable and accessible to attendees through a content website, conference app or USB, and design, format, print and ship your conference materials within your tight timeline.

Working with organizations to collect and deliver content is what Omnipress was founded to do. We think beyond your initial collection, providing guidance and insights so that your entire process, from collection through production, is significantly easier to manage.

Discover the difference that working with a company founded to help associations can have on your conference.