

Memorandum

To: Executive Board
Conference for Food Protection

From: Jeff Lineberry
Executive Director

Subject: Registration for the Biennial Meeting

Executive Summary

The current method of biennial meeting registration is both labor intensive, outdated, and prone to errors. Information is transcribed manually to the Conference for Food Protection (CFP) database. Receipts are produced individually and do not contain a confirmation number. Sponsor exemptions are difficult to track and administer. Collection of pertinent data, important for the strategic direction and management of CFP is limited and cumbersome.

Online registration firms provide efficient, accurate registration services that include multiple payment methods, prompt customer service to registrants, interactive program and agenda information, and customized reporting capability.

Costs vary by firm and the extent of the service provided. The two firms evaluated by CFP staff include Attendee Management, Inc. and Iplanit. Estimated net additional cost for 400 biennial meeting attendees would be approximately \$5500.00 based on elimination of some current expenses and payment of approximately \$12.50 per attendee plus nominal set up charges.

Based on our review, I recommend that the CFP Board direct me to begin negotiations on a contract with Attendee Management, Inc. to provide online registration services for the 2012 biennial meeting. 3/22/11 A third firm has recently provided a demonstration of their product. This firm may be significantly cheaper than Attendee Management, Inc. I will present details at the meeting.

Existing Registration Procedures

Registration for the CFP biennial meeting is accomplished in one of three ways: 1) an online registration form and credit card, 2) printed registration form faxed to CFP with credit card information, or 3) printed registration form mailed to CFP with a check or credit card information. Online registration information is received by Lisa Wright, who enters the membership information into our database, and Eric Pippert, who processes the fees. In the case of faxed or mailed registrations Eric enters the registrant's credit card information online or deposits the check, sends a receipt, and forwards the registrant information to Lisa Wright. If there are any issues with credit card processing or registrant information, Lisa and/or Eric attempt to contact the registrant to resolve the problems. Lisa and Eric periodically reconcile the database information with the fees collected and resolve discrepancies as they arise.

There is a fourth method of registration whereby CFP sponsors receive complimentary registration in appreciation for sponsorship. The number of complimentary registrations varies with the sponsorship level. In these cases Lisa and/or Eric must match the registrant information to the appropriate sponsor and ensure that no more than the allotted number of complimentary registrations are awarded.

In order to operate this registration system CFP incurs certain costs. These include website set-up and maintenance costs at \$75/hour (typically 10 hours or less), installation and monthly rental of a "Secure Socket" encryption program on the CFP website to ensure that personal financial information of registrants is protected, and interchange fees associated with a "merchant account" CFP uses to collect the money paid for registration. CFP also creates an 8 page registration brochure using a graphic artist and professional printer. This brochure is mailed to all CFP members at a cost of several thousand dollars.

This system has worked reasonably well in the past, but has some significant drawbacks. The most important of these is maintaining accurate records of all registrants and ensuring that fees are collected and credited properly. Since all of the registration information on the form must be re-typed into the CFP database, errors are inevitable, especially during "crunch time" before the biennial meeting. In addition, if there are any problems processing a registration, the registrant must attempt to resolve these through Lisa and Eric, who may not be immediately available or have the expertise to solve the problem. Not only is the the whole registration process labor intensive for CFP staff who may have to enter similar information in multiple places and reconcile discrepancies manually, but our registrants are caught up in this cumbersome process.

Online Registration Services

There are firms that design registration websites with the look and feel of the existing CFP website. These registration sites may include information on the program, workshop, speakers, hotel, menus, off-site activities., and much more. They allow various payment methods including any type of credit card, "Pay Pal", check, or purchase order. "Discount codes can be provided that would allow a defined number of complimentary registrations. Registrant receipts are sent immediately upon completion of the registration form, and include a confirmation number. Cancellations can be handled in accordance with CFP policy, and with individual authorization from CFP staff. There is literally no limit to the type of information that can be provided or collected.

Any problems encountered with the registration process are first handled by the vendor's customer service staff, not CFP. Members can still reach CFP staff directly for questions about the events at the biennial meeting.

I believe that, if the Executive Board authorizes the use of an online registration firm, the biggest benefits are better customer service for CFP members and accurate data for the use of the CFP board and staff to guide the direction of the organization.

Members will have the benefit of a sophisticated, interactive registration process which is designed to be efficient and prevent errors (previous attendees can even have their registration form populated from existing database information). Customer service representatives are available to resolve problems immediately during regular business hours.

CFP would have access to fully customizable reports (in multiple formats including spreadsheets) that will help us better manage the meeting. In addition to the usual financial reports and membership rosters, we would be able to monitor the registration status of Council, Delegate, and Board members with the ability to send emails to individuals or groups from within a report.

The cost to use an online registration service varies by vendor and typically costs between \$16 and \$26 or more per registration. Terri Ribble of ConferenceDirect arranged for Lisa Wright and I to see two online demonstrations. Both firms offer high quality service and are very reputable. Because of the volume of business they do with ConferenceDirect's clients, special pricing is extended to us for their customizable solutions making it very cost effective even for smaller groups like ours. The first, Attendee Management, Inc. (<http://www.attendeenet.com>), is based near Austin, Texas. They are a small company employing a very robust software package licensed from a software firm. The second, Iplanit (www.iplanitmeetings.com) is a somewhat larger company based in Longmont, Colorado. Iplanit uses a different software engine with similar features. Both have extensive experience, however, Jeff Rasco of Attendee Management was a meeting planner for 15 years before starting up his company. He took some time to learn about CFP before the demonstration and seemed to have a good feel for our needs. Despite being the CEO of the firm, he seemed very accessible for any future dealings with CFP. Iplanit emphasized the many bells and whistles associated with their software (e.g. How many left handed lady golfers need to rent clubs for the tournament?). Both firms offer the ability to process payments through their own merchant account or the existing CFP merchant account.

Attendee Management, Inc. quoted a (negotiable) fee of \$12.50 per registrant plus undetermined set up costs (estimated to be less than \$1000.00). Set up costs for future meetings would be much less based on similar parameters with minor changes. Iplanit quoted a \$13.00 per registrant fee with no set up costs if we use the CFP merchant account; \$18.00 per registrant if we use the Iplanit merchant account. Both firms would add additional fees of up to 5% if CFP chooses to use their merchant account. The current CFP merchant account interchange fees range from 1.9% to 3.8% depending on the type of credit card used.

Recommendation

Registration for the Biennial Meeting

CFP members would benefit from the use of a more efficient, and accurate registration process. CFP administration would also benefit through better meeting management, data collection for key decisions and future marketing capabilities. I recommend that the Executive Board direct me to enter into negotiations for online registration services for the 2012 biennial meeting in Indianapolis. If approved, I will submit the report to a steering committee consisting of the Conference Chair, Vice-Chair, Strategic Planning Committee Chair, Treasurer and Executive Assistant for review before signing.

3/22/11 Eventbrite, a San Francisco based online registration firm has recently demonstrated their product and provided an example of a website that could be used for registration. I will try to demonstrate this site during the Board meeting.