

## 'Oceans' of Dreams

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**Y**ou asked for it! The societies have provided it! Now it's up to you to retain it!

Since 1989, the Marine Technology Society and Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Oceanic Engineering Society (IEEE OES) have held separate annual conferences—much to the chagrin of the attendees, speakers, and exhibitors—who usually had to choose one or the other. The effect of this choice was a split in participation between speakers and exhibitors, resulting in an overall decrease in the number of peer group contacts that the attendees could expect—and at no reduction in price.

This year promises to be different! The societies, responding to your call, have combined to give you Oceans 95 MTS/IEEE.

Great! So the problem is solved and we can go on from here. . . right? No more worries about multiple conferences and diluted papers, exhibits, and attendance . . . right? Wrong!

Thus the reason for this essay. It's time for someone to set the record straight and I feel I can provide the needed perspective. Let's discuss four areas: technical program, exhibits, attendees, and the future.

A good conference requires a strong technical program, otherwise it is only a trade show. The technical program includes or attracts the decision-makers, the people who attract the exhibitors, who subsequently draw those whose desire is to stay abreast of the current technology in their professional disciplines. The point is that papers are not accepted to

make the conference as large as possible and to make more money off the authors. To the contrary, it takes more than a third of a million U.S. dollars to put on this level of a conference with nearly half budgeted for author coverage that includes a promotion, presentation, and publishing of their work. The conference subsidizes every author it accepts. It is a very costly venture to provide a technical forum and we should thank the societies for providing it. I personally cut my professional teeth at the earlier Oceans conferences and probably would not have reached my present technical position if not for those opportunities. **Be an author!**

The exhibitors provide the lion's share of the conference income and are present in order to do business. Why else? Their expenses are high when you consider the cost of booth design, development, shipping, and setup; the booth duty labor; and handouts and other booth amenities. The \$1,500 base price to exhibit is minor in comparison but critical for the conference.

How does this affect you? If attendees don't come, the exhibitors will stop coming and the conference will die. Simple math. The bottom line rules. It is a reduction in income for societies to combine their conferences, since they will now split the proceeds. Believe me, the exhibition will not double in size. The societies are looking at a financial liability to provide what you have asked for—a single conference—so support it and the exhibitors who essentially finance the event. So, marketers, don't pass up this opportunity to reach the movers and shakers in the ocean community. **Be an exhibitor!**

Speaking of the movers and shakers, let's discuss what the conference can do for you. It seems rather cost-ineffective to make several trips to visit colleagues individually, especially when most of them could be at the conference. Attendance at the annual conference is absolutely the best method going in order to do business cost-effectively, renew old friendships, get smart, and expand the key to our futures—the omniscient network. Most of us are who we know. If you think you aren't, unplug your phone, fax, and e-mail and then try to do your job. Few of us would survive. Teamwork and cooperation rules all of us.

And, in today's downsizing environment, this is becoming even more important. You can choose to participate in this conference and keep up with the pack . . . or stay home and let them leave you behind. **Be a participant!**

That brings us to the future. There are

several aspects: societies, conferences, professional, and the industry. It is simple. Conferences such as this depend upon your participation. The cost of doing business today, especially for the societies, is increasing. Because of low participation at some recent conferences, they have either lost money or barely broken even. This can become a financial death spiral. Without the societies, there will be no conferences. Without these conferences you'll be paying to visit each company individually, and an efficient technical exchange will be gone except for the journals, assuming the money is still there to publish them. Say goodbye to the easy approach to networking; now you'll really have to work to stay current. You won't get new business cards each year at the conference from the many people in your network who recently changed positions or jobs. And, without the societies and the conferences, who will introduce our youth to this area of technology? Who will be there to use and protect our oceans in the future?

To put it rather bluntly, it is time for us all "to put up or shut up."

You have asked for this combined conference, so let's get unified behind it and support it in the fashion our industry deserves. It's a proven fact that trade shows and technical conferences work! You who present papers, make them good and give a professional presentation that embellishes the dynamics of the ocean itself. You who are thinking about coming, do it; if you need conference information, **use the insert in this issue of Sea Technology**. Attend and learn. . . and grow. You who are considering a career in the ocean arena, come to the conference, join the societies, and catch the wave of the future.

The theme for the 1989 movie *Field of Dreams* was "if you build it, they will come." OK, we built it. I'll be there as your chairman. I want this conference to be a success and to do so, I'm breaking a promise. After chairing 10 consecutive ROV conferences, ending at ROV 92, I decided it was time to "retire" from the "conference circuit." However, when asked to chair the Oceans 95 MTS/IEEE conference—one that could potentially reunify our community—I couldn't pass it up. The team of volunteers working on this year's conference has easily participated in more than 200 conference committees. We're dedicated to providing the unified forum that you have all asked for.

The question is: will you attend? The "Oceans" of dreams is here for you. Use it or lose it. *st*