

Do We Order a Ticket for New Orleans?

Spearhead is again organising an Oceanology International (OI), one of the more successful conferences and exhibition events. The 2003 event is to be held in New Orleans, USA - one more in the row of OI Americas. This year the circumstances with regard to the world economy and the international political and health situation are not normal and may offer constraints on the wish to participate. By tradition, every OI Special issue of Hydro international includes a multi-interview with representatives of the world hydrographic community. For our present issue we asked them to give us their views on OI America 2003.

George Schlagintweit, Hydrographer with Pacific Region, Canadian Hydrographic Service

For what reason is visiting OI Americas not on your agenda? Are there too many such events in your region or does the reason lie in the background economic climate or international political situation?

The first two reasons really cover it. Offset by a year, both Canada (CHS) and the US (NOAA) host hydrographic conferences every two years. If hydrographers have to choose between a hydrographic conference and OI, the decision is straightforward. With travel being as expensive as it is in Canada many meetings are usually scheduled around our conferences, as these are well attended by staff from both HOs. So that is the reality of today. However, I believe this may change in the future. The hydrographic community is beginning to appreciate the fact that its role is broadening to address issues such as coastal zone management, geo-hazard investigation (identification of geological hazards), data integration and other multidisciplinary initiatives. As such, I believe the fit with OI will increase with time and a merged event may benefit all delegates.

We have come a long way in mastering the oceans. Will we ever succeed and what do you see as the ultimate goal to achieve?

I think the term "master"™ is far too strong a term when taken in this context. Climate variability, global warming, post-glacial rebound, subduction, and coastal erosion and accretion will challenge the hydrographic and oceanographic community indefinitely. From my perspective as a hydrographer, our long-term and ultimate goal should be to acquire and maintain one hundred per cent multibeam coverage of all oceans and navigable waterways. Considering that we know more about the moon's topography than we do of our ocean's bathymetry, we have a long way to go. A colleague recently computed that at our present rate of data acquisition and technology it will take roughly one hundred years to survey the entire West Coast of Canada with multibeam acoustic surveys in water deeper than 10m. For hydrography in the nearshore zone; d<10m to elevations of 5-10m, our techniques show significant room for improvement. integrated topo>

How do you see the future of your organisation in view of the background economic climate? Will this result in fewer visits to conferences and exhibitions?

With our level of resources on the continual decline, we certainly cannot operate in the way we have in the past. A trend towards data management, with a de-emphasis on data acquisition and distribution appears to be where we are headed. Where feasible, the private sector will absorb the void left by the public sector. The need for conferences and exhibitions is unlikely to decline. Rather, with the rapid pace of developments in the high-tech sector, the need to "keep the pulse"™ will only increase. These events also provide the best opportunity for organisations to forge new partnerships and strategic alliances, something we are likely to see a lot more of in the future.

Mark Sinclair, Survey Manager, Tenix LADS

What is the importance for Australian companies, and for yours in particular, of conferences and exhibitions in the USA region?

Conferences and exhibitions in the USA are very important because the US survey market is so big, which presents many survey opportunities for the private sector. An example of this is the recent Lidar Anywhere Solicitation from NOAA, to provide Lidar survey services for nautical charting anywhere in the US and its territories. There is also a large amount of Lidar work for coastal zone management for the states and counties. To pursue these opportunities for lidar survey we have established a new business, Tenix LADS Incorporated, in Biloxi, Mississippi.

In how far is the weak economic climate influencing your decision whether or not to participate in an exhibition/conference?

The weak economic climate affects customers and their budgets, so we must be careful during such periods to match our marketing effort to the prospects of future work. However, Tenix LADS has a global survey capability, which enables us to work in different regions with different economic conditions. We are also aware that we must engage our customers throughout good times and bad, to be able to anticipate and meet their future Lidar hydrographic survey requirements.

Have you visited OI Americas and OI London before? If so, what is for you the difference between the two?

We always attend OI Americas and OI London. The differences are in the different regional content between these two venues. European customers may not get all the way to the USA and the representatives of the states and counties within the USA may not always be able to make it to London. However, despite the geographical separation we find that the lessons learned in one part of the world often apply to another. For example, conditions in northern Norway are similar to Alaska and Queensland and the North West Shelf of Australia are similar to Florida and the Middle East, respectively. This helps Tenix LADS to support customers from both regions.

Sabine Mller, Managing Director, INNOMAR Technologies GmbH

In what sort of conferences and exhibitions is your Company interested? Is oceanography also part of your target group?

Actually, Innomar is known as a manufacturer of innovative and advanced equipment for different applications in the field of the oceanography and marine industry. For several years we have been participating both in the Oceanology exhibition and conference and in other meetings under the banner of oceanography, meeting others with a lot of knowledge and interest in these specific fields. Our parametric sub-bottom profiler equipment is suited for various applications in oceanography, especially in shelf areas.

What sort of impact are the current background economic climate and international political constraints having upon you and/or your company?

The economic situation in some areas of the world has, of course, decreased readiness for investments in new equipment, for example in Europe and America. On the other hand, we see positive economic trends in other areas; for example in China and some other countries in Asia. Our business in the different market places is changing according to the economic climate in these areas. Political events, like the war in Iraq, will not really affect our part of business in the long-term.

Do you in general like the formula of combined conference and exhibition? Is there anything in this combination you would like to see changed?

We see a good chance to attract people with higher levels of knowledge and more decision-makers by combining an exhibition and a conference. This gives the possibilities for attaining a lot of information about trends in the field of research and development, learning about practice requirements and introducing our equipment to potential customers. In general, we would not change this principle.

Tetsuya Nakamura, Sales Engineer in the Ocean Business Group of NGK, Japan

You will be attending OI Americas for the first time. Which part of the event is more important to you and your company, the conference or the exhibition?

Both the conference and the exhibition are important for us, although there is an emphasis on the exhibition.

Can you give a short description of your company? Is the continent of America important for your business or do you prefer conferences and exhibitions in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur or Australia/New Zealand?

Nichiyu Giken Kogyo Co. Ltd. (NGK) is active in many fields, from deep sea to space, in making components with R&D relating to high technology. The philosophy of the company is "to contribute to society with safety and reliability". Our strategy in meeting stagnation in the Japanese economy is to exploit new fields and develop new products, such as underwater automatic elevators, samplers for shallow water and deep sea, accurate temperature and pressure recorders, etc. The American continent has first preference for our business, in particular for our acoustic releases. Therefore we will have a booth at the exhibition to show our products and will also attend conference presentations.

Is there any constraint on your overseas business as a result of differences in lifestyle, language or writing? If so, how do you overcome these?

There are indeed some minor constraints in the smooth proceeding of our overseas business. To overcome such problems, we believe that having regular face-to-face meetings with our business contacts is very effective.

Professor Shahriar Neghadari-pour, Professor of Electrical & Computer Engineering, University of Miami

What is the importance of this year's OI in New Orleans for your university in general and yourself in particular?

To be honest with you, I have not been an attendant of Oceanology International (OI) on a regular basis. In fact, the only one I attended was the one held in Miami, which I could do at very low expense. In fact, I was able to arrange for a one-day demonstration once I noticed the facilities in the exhibition hall. I am working on vision-based technologies for ROVs and submersible platforms, where such an event provides a great opportunity to exhibit and inform the public, particularly industry, of our new developments. Unfortunately, being at a university, I have several constraints on how my travel funds and support can be used. For example, though I can go to a technical conference with available travel funds, most often from federal grants, I cannot use it for attending exhibition events.

There are many scientific conferences in your region. What is the added value of OI-type events for you?

This is related to my answer to your first question. As stated, the most important added value is the exhibition and the strong presence of many manufacturers and distributors of underwater equipment and instruments. This could be the right opportunity for ROV vendors to see and learn about our technologies, and potentially for them to become interested in and willing to implement them on their platforms.

Is oceanography of interest to all countries in the world? Should it be a United Nations activity, and if so, in what form?

Undoubtedly, many countries depend on the ocean and its resources in one form or the other. Thus they can benefit tremendously from the latest developments in science and technology, particularly tools, equipment and instruments that enable more efficient and effective use of ocean resources. However, I cannot imagine any specific advantages in sponsorship from the United Nations.

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