

**T**hese days, medical delegates are more interested in collecting career credits than air miles when they attend conventions. Medical doctors are now expected to undertake between 30 and 70 hours approved educational development a year in various Continuous Medical Education (CME) schemes. CME has been practised in the United States for years, but now it's seeping into Europe and congress organisers and their sponsors have to ask themselves whether their traditional events can be tailored to fit a CME programme.

However, rather than hedge-hopping from one lecture to another all over Europe, there now seems to be another way to pile on those precious points. Inevitably it's through technology. Medical delegates may not have to attend a medical conference in order to have their card stamped. So long as they can show they learned something from a conference, that's OK. They might even do better by staying home and 'learning by themselves after the event'.

All they may have to show is clear evidence that the educational element has been recorded and that their understanding and retention has been assessed.

**To meet  
or not to meet?  
That is the  
question which  
medics are asking  
themselves  
much more  
these days**

own schedules."

According to Marc Merckx, the recent past president of the IPCAA (International Pharmaceutical Conference Association) there is a trend towards larger 'regional' events and smaller, more frequent therapeutic area-specific events and away from mega global meetings.

As electronic communications become cheaper, and travel more expensive, the meaningful capture and dissemination of content will be critical to any event. But people won't stop attending events just because content can be made available afterwards. Human beings are innately sociable creatures, and networking value is arguably the highest priority to attending delegates. However, if a congress has CME accreditation, this will be of enormous added value for participants.

Figures show that it costs \$2,400 to keep an average delegate at an average congress. And that an average non-scientific delegate forgets 80 per cent of presentation content within two weeks. That represents a wastage of \$1,920 for non-scientific events. The largely technical nature of scientific events could mean that the amount of content retained is substantially higher



# Counting the credits at medical meetings

Through the power of the CD-ROM, the feel and the thrust, the education - and the examination - of the congress can be delivered to the candidate whether he/she has attended the congress or not.

Technologically, it's already being done, but is it of interest to event organisers? Imarco Frontline believes it is. This company produces 'live' video and slides as well as text transcriptions of conference sessions all on one 'Conference on a Disc' (CoaD).

"We are discussing with one major pharmaceutical company how to include CME as an extension to its symposia," reveals sales director Matt O'Neill. "Some doctors are already saying that it is increasingly difficult to take time out from practice to participate in CME. The advantage of CoaD is that doctors can participate in CME at times to suit their

because of its inherent value to delegates.

The cost of producing a CD-ROM is less than \$20 per delegate and all the key essentials of the congress can be archived 'live' on to it. The average delegate can revisit each and every plenary session again and again for a one-to-one repeat - with synchronised voice, video and slides - of what was said. Moreover a powerful search facility allows the delegate to search any of the presentations by topic.

The clincher has to be the CD-ROM's ability to undertake self-test and knowledge retention testing in support of CME objectives. Use of this facility could be just the proof the medical profession and the congress industry needs to prove that medical congresses really are a valuable contributor to CME.

When used with a PC connected

directly to the Internet or via a network, the CD-ROM interlinks with a powerful on-line questionnaire facility. This not only records and recognises each delegate but the supporting online database opens up an opportunity for test and knowledge assessment after the event.

However, whatever strides are made in new communication technologies, they must provide real benefit for end users. The meetings industry must never allow itself to become a victim of 'style over substance'.

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*Inspiration and sources include:*

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