

## ENERGISE, ENTHUSE, INSPIRE

EEL gives a voice to the new generation of library and information professionals. If you have any suggestions or topics for this column, please contact the column co-ordinator Lesa Maclean at [maclean.lesa@gmail.com](mailto:maclean.lesa@gmail.com)

## TRY IT – YOU MIGHT LIKE IT

**Presenting at a conference can be quite daunting, especially if you are new to it. Ghylène Palmer says it's not that scary. She has lots of good advice for first time presenters.**

From my personal experience presenting at a conference is not as scary as it may seem. First you need to attend a few conferences so you know what to expect from your audience. Observe the different styles of presentations and you will get to know what others are doing. You will meet other library professionals who share your passion for the industry and you will get an opportunity to exchange ideas with them.

**T**his is a chance for you to share your experiences, build your network and be part of the library industry community. Besides, let's face it – it will look great on your resume.

If your employer cannot fund you to attend a conference, then try to fund yourself, it is a worthwhile professional development activity to spend your money on.

There are many library-related conferences out there, and it is important to choose the right one for your first presentation. If you do not want to present alone, then find a peer or two from your workplace or from other workplaces who can write the paper with you and present with you. Being on stage with others is a lot less intimidating than being up there on your own and a great way to break through that first presentation barrier. Remember, your audience is made up of library professionals just like you and they are all very supportive and forgiving. You do not need to be an expert at public speaking or be a comedian to present a paper at a conference, you just need to know your paper well and present it well.

You might be asking "Why should I present at a conference?" "Why would anyone want to listen to what I have to say?" or "What do I have to contribute to the profession?" This is a chance for you to share your experiences, build your network and be part of the library industry community. Besides, let's face it – it will look great on your resume. So get to it, write an abstract and send it off. It is such a rewarding feeling when you receive that email that your abstract has been accepted.

But then the real work begins. Prepare, prepare, prepare. Make sure you know exactly how much time you have to present. Work out who your target audience is. What is the main message you wish to get across? You need to have an introduction, middle and conclusion.

Next it's practise, practise, practise. Test your presentation out on your work colleagues and friends. Ask them for advice and feedback. Plan everything in advance, especially how you are going to get to the venue, how early you should get there, and who you should see to organise technical support on the day of the presentation. Get to the venue early and rehearse on stage with the microphone, visual aids and all the equipment. You will be more comfortable on stage if you have already been up there once and it is less scary when everyone walks in. Do not use any new technology you are not already familiar with and comfortable using. Back up your entire presentation in several formats.

If you are passionate about your topic and know it well, you will be more confident and that confidence will shine through the delivery of your paper. Engage with your audience, vary your pitch and breathe! Be interesting and have fun. Make regular eye contact. Speak loudly and clearly. Let your presentation tell a story and repeat your main message. Be proud! You have put a lot of work into this presentation.

So what about those nerves? Being nervous is natural and it just means you care about delivering something great



and worthwhile for your audience. You do not need to worry, your audience is there because they want to hear what you have to say based on the abstract you provided. They are already interested! Don't worry, the adrenaline rush will get you through.

If there are any questions you feel you cannot answer on the spot, be honest and say "thank you for your question but I am unsure – email me your details and I will find out for you". Make sure you have your business cards with you on the day and that your contact details are clearly displayed for all members of the audience.

After it is all over, make sure you celebrate. Evaluate your efforts and ask others for feedback but do not overanalyse – what is done is done. There is always room for improvement, so learn from this experience and get ready for the next paper. For the sake of the profession, we need to encourage our colleagues to voice their professional ideas and opinions so we can all learn something from each other.

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