

Attendee Lists for Attendees

By Norman M. Goldfarb

Many industry conferences cost \$1,295 or more to attend, plus travel costs and time away from home and office. A significant part of the value of a conference is networking with the other attendees. The price of admission normally includes a copy of the speakers' slides, but not a list of the attendees with contact information.

I recently learned of an attempt at industrial espionage: An employee of a conference organizer sent me an email message requesting information about a conference that I spoke at. (Figure 1) The employee did not identify her employer and even signed the message with a false name. This type of "competitive intelligence" activity is why conference organizers, with rare exceptions, do not share attendee lists.

Figure 1: "Competitive Intelligence" Email Message

"xxxxx xxxxxxxx" <xxxxxxx@hotmail.com>
06/07/2005 02:52 PM

To: ngoldfarb@firstclinical.com
cc:
Subject: A project about 15th International Contracting Negotiating Clinical Trials Conf-

Hi! I am doing research on Pharmaceutical Conferences and I had a couple of questions about the conference you attended called: 15th International Contracting Negotiating Clinical Trials.

1. How many attendees would you say were there?
2. Why do you feel the turnout of attendees was as you stated previously?
3. How would you rate the conference? Well Done/Not Well Done/Why?
4. How would you rate the topic? Hot/Still warm/lukewarm/done to death
5. Was there a better angle that could have been taken or a session that could have been extended?
6. What kinds of attendees were there (Types of companies, titles, etc)
7. Who were the notable speakers?
8. Do you have an attendee list you could reply back to me with?

Thank you for your time!!

-SARA-

Express yourself instantly with MSN Messenger! Download today - it's FREE!
<http://messenger.msn.click-url.com/go/onm00200471ave/direct/01/>

I am therefore proposing a Code of Ethics for organizers of clinical research conferences:

1. We do not seek information under false pretenses, e.g., by concealing our identity.
2. We do not solicit, accept or use conference attendee lists from competitors without their permission.

Three weeks ago, I sent an email to numerous commercial conference organizers and industry associations requesting that they agree to abide by this Code. Only one – The Association of Clinical Research Professionals (ACRP) – has agreed to sign the Code.

All conference organizers plead innocence, but all believe that some of their competitors are less ethical. If they do not engage in these practices, signing the Code of Ethics would not limit their actions. The Code will not go into effect until all of the leading clinical research conference organizers sign on. As their customer, you can motivate them to cooperate. The Code will not require them to distribute the lists; that is a question of value and customer service that each will decide individually.

Directories of commercial clinical research industry organizers and industry associations are at <http://www.firstclinical.com/directories>. I encourage you to patronize those that sign the Code.

By salting the lists with a few dummy names, miscreants can easily be detected. Attendees who do not want their names published can opt-out of the lists. Given the high value this industry places on ethical behavior, it would be unwise to sign and then violate the Code.

This Code of Ethics is an opportunity for the clinical research industry to collaborate on a goal that many of us share. Success in this project will build confidence that the industry can work together to solve other problems that we share.

Stay tuned...

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