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ATG Luminaries

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ATG Luminaries — Comment On ... The Charleston Conference

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Working in a specialized area of any field can be isolating, and librarianship is no exception. I'm an electronic resources librarian at a large public university, and if it weren't for a couple of colleagues who also work with e-resources or did so in the past, I'd have to drive a few hours to find someone who really understands my job.

Attending the Charleston Conference helps remind me that even though I sometimes feel isolated, I'm actually part of a large, vibrant community of information professionals who not only understand my day-to-day work, but also share the same bigger picture concerns that I do. Like many others, I attend Webinars, read blogs, and follow the listserv chatter, but there is something unique and special about the face-to-face interactions that happen at a conference. Conversations that would be laborious over email flow easily when chatting over coffee, and when presentations end you can chat with fellow interested audience members rather than simply close a browser window and return to work.

Conferences are a wonderful opportunity for professional development and networking, but they also serve an important community-building function that is sometimes overlooked. Standing in the crowded lobby of the Francis Marion hotel in Charleston, surrounded by a diversity of colleagues, my sense of being part of a larger community is affirmed. 🌳



Leah Hinds

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I've worked to help organize the Conference since 2005. It's an exciting, ever-changing job, and I love the challenges presented by the logistics each year. We focus on being open, informal, and giving everyone an equal playing field to voice their ideas and opinions; this requires some "creative problem solving" at times to find a way to make things work, but these times of thinking outside the box often lead to our most popular new features. This year, for example, we had an inordinate amount of plenary-level proposals that led to the creation of the "Charleston Neapolitan" sessions — three plenary presentations running simultaneously in the three main ballrooms of our headquarter hotel, all of which are being recorded for later viewing on our YouTube channel. I think this will be a fun way to prove our theme this year, "Too Much Is Not Enough!"

This year's Conference will be held across five locations: the Francis Marion Hotel, Courtyard Marriott Historic District, Embassy Suites Historic District, College of Charleston Addlestone Library, and College of Charleston Science and Mathematics Building. We have around 500 speakers, and expect to have over 1,500 attendees. The schedule contains 10 preconferences, 15 plenary sessions, and over 200 concurrent sessions, lively lunches, posters, and "shotgun" sessions. I look forward to continuing the Charleston tradition of presenting the latest information industry content in a casual and open atmosphere. 🌳



Erin Luckett

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The Charleston Conference is one of the best conferences I attend each year — and by far my favorite. But what makes it so special? Is it the people that attend? A single day for exhibits? The speakers and sessions on the schedule? The camaraderie between vendors and librarians? The location? The food? Yes, yes and yes. Choosing just one thing that makes this a "must attend" conference is practically impossible, but having a single day dedicated for the exhibits ranks pretty high. At other conferences, vendors are usually tied to the booth and don't have time to attend sessions in far flung hotels. This is not the case in Charleston. If we so choose, vendors can register for the conference and attend as a participant. Yes, we will still have breakfast, lunch, and dinner meetings with prospects and clients but we also have the ability to attend a plenary or a concurrent session. Being in the audience, sitting alongside our customers, listening to them present their ideas, voice their concerns, and debate what changes their profession will be facing in the next five years, can be very eye-opening and educational for vendors — and frankly, the knowledge gained by sitting on the floor in an overcrowded, overheated meeting room is well worth the price of admission. 🌳



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I have many memories of the Conference, mainly missteps that we (I) made. There was the time in the Lightsey Conference Center when we didn't have enough bathrooms for the women so I closed down the men's bathroom and made them go across the quad to relieve themselves. Of course, it was a very unpopular move. I remember the year that Hurricane Hugo hit Charleston. It was September 21, 1989, the same year that we started *Against the Grain*. I remember putting my two computers in the volkswagen with various floppy discs and heading out of town. We came back to Charleston to find trees and power lines everywhere. The Conference was supposed to be in the Mills House Hotel (I remember that **Dwayne Webster** was on a huge panel we were looking forward to). There was no way to drive down there so I walked to find devastation everywhere but the hotel told me that all would be fine, not to worry. Sure enough, the show went on!

I always have a dream, usually a nightmare, right before the Conference. The one I remember vividly (a nightmare) was when I was at the microphone at the front of the room and everyone was looking the other way, out the windows that were at the back of the room! Oh well. The show continues to go on in spite of hurricanes, nightmares, and bathrooms! 🌳