

Editorial

Falling interest and high costs have recently eroded enthusiasm for conference attendance. Librarians are finding it more difficult to justify and obtain supportive funding, while exhibitors are beginning to question the value of an expensive stand and a team's hotel bills when put against business gains. I can still see the boredom on exhibitors' faces at Info '90 during periods of stultifying quiet while the modest gathering of delegates attended papers and left the exhibition hall eerily empty. The Aslib conference, once upon a time one of the liveliest on the calendar, faded away; then came the announcement from the Library Association about the demise of its major event. Now we have the question put by IFLA as to whether its conferences should be held less frequently given the far distances to be travelled by many participants and the cost of attending.

I wonder, though, whether we have a parallel here with serial publication. In the UK we have seen the steady decline of the once popular generalist journal e.g. "New Statesman", "Spectator" and "Listener", but a continuing flood of specialist titles, both of the popular type and at research and academic level. It may be our reading and conference attendance are now strongly linked with intensive, narrow field interests rather than larger, more diffuse preoccupations.

The success of the first TALES exhibition, which gave exhibitors full frontal exposure at reasonable cost also sends a strong message to conference organisers. Reasonable square metre charges combined with full attendance and a steady flow of visitors to the stands is a combination

appreciated by those wishing to sell products and services. If the event is suitably condensed, the exhibition aspect can be made all-absorbing.

Fortunately, serials seems to be one of the specialist areas which attracts steady interest. The Seventh International Learned Journals Seminar is to be held on Friday, 5th April, with the bold title,

"Publishers : Who Needs Them?"

and participants will know that the day will be typified by quality papers and efficient organisation. The following week some 300 or so publishers, agents and librarians will gather in York to enjoy the 14th UKSG Annual Conference. Again on offer will be good papers and organisation, a lively, sociable atmosphere and about 40 exhibitors who will have a fair crack of the whip, given the moderate charges set by the organisers. Perhaps the strength of UKSG is its sense of community built up around the producer - distributor - consumer serials chain. But possibly even it is a little protracted. Would it lose anything if it were reduced by 12-24 hours? Perhaps asking delegates to be away from work for the working week is a little excessive in these times of pressure. □

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