

Updates: Meetings Innovations, India Visit

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President's Forum: www.spe.org



The world is still in a crisis, and SPE is beginning to see consequences. Some of our conferences and workshops have seen fewer attendees. However, membership growth doesn't seem to be affected much.

Financial crises are strange creatures. When I visited the Vietnam Section in April, section secretary Ben Gedge made a very wise observation. He said that most of us can live very happily without buying anything new for the next 2 years. However, if we do that, he said, of course the people who manufacture those new things have less income and they will

also delay buying "new things," which will cause the global economy to continue its downward spiral, and there is your crisis. This is exactly what is happening at the moment. Many of our members' companies are "managing" costs by delaying expenditures, including those for learning/networking events like our conferences and workshops. This is a dangerous path, as it will create a downward spiral in knowledge dissemination, where knowledge and global cooperation is key to our industry if we want to continue to provide the world with energy when demand picks up. SPE therefore is trying to break this spiral in a number of ways and has taken a number of actions, mainly to reduce need for travel for members.

One example was piloted in the Gulf Coast Section's recent Digital Energy Conference in Houston, where we held a parallel conference in Second Life. Instead of being there physically, the authors presented their papers "virtually" via the Internet, through their avatars in Second Life. The Second Life conference was presented to the audience in Houston on a big screen.

In March, we used Webex and Skype to bring a presenter in Colorado, USA, to workshop attendees in Queensland, Australia. Remote presentations with interactive audience participation were also done at our May workshop on IOR Petrophysics in Cairo. No visitors yet in a "virtual presentation room," but that could be the next step.

Second, SPE will also bring meetings/workshops/conferences closer to where the members are. So, we will hold very few conferences in fancy places, and, if practicable, more in major industry centres like Amsterdam, Aberdeen, Houston, and Kuala Lumpur.

Third, we will webstream key presentations from large conferences, so that anyone can follow the presentations in his/her own office on the computer screen. More innovations may come, and I am open for suggestions.

In the long run, conferences and workshops without real people will not be easy to sustain, as building a network is an important aspect of those events. However, we believe that for the next 1 to 2 years this will work and we will put a lot of effort into finding new ways to bring people together, such as SPE virtual networks, discussion groups, etc.

SPE presidents travel quite a lot and talk to many members, the lifeblood of our Society. However tough the current outlook may seem for both the world economy and the oil industry, I am always optimistic after visiting with our members. My recent trip to India is an example.

This is a new area for SPE, relatively speaking. The first section was set up in Ahmedabad in 1986, followed by the North India (1989) and Mumbai (1990) sec-

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tions. Five of the current eight sections were founded during 2006–08. India sections had a membership growth of around 15% for 2007–08, the sort of increase that more mature SPE regions can only dream of.

Nowadays, growth is a word commonly applied to many aspects of Indian society. India's energy consumption is forecast to total over 15 million BOPD by 2030, equal to 6 B/D per person—still small when compared with current U.S. consumption of 24 B/D per person. India's largest challenge is to develop the energy sources to meet this demand. The country relies heavily on oil but production is stable; though it has substantial gas reserves, there is no pipeline infrastructure. Less than 50% of the country has been explored but there are large expectations for coalbed methane, seabed hydrates, and coal. India is actively experimenting with underground coal gasification and coal-to-liquid technology.

According to R.S. Sharma, Chairman and Managing Director of India's national oil company, Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), the industry needs to adopt a more collaborative approach to mobilize physical as well as intellectual resources to enhance capability and to reduce failure rates. He also advocates public/private partnerships.

I visited five of the eight Indian sections during my stay and was impressed by their energy and range of activities, as well as their wonderful hospitality. Discussions with the various section boards and local company executives gave me valuable insights into their successes and concerns.

As seems to be a worldwide good news story, SPE young professionals programs and student chapters are thriving in India. Ambassador Lecturer programs, sponsorships, and close links with local sections are already in place, but the young professionals would welcome more access to best practices from around the globe.

All sections, particularly for young professionals, show keen interest in accreditation and SPE awards. The sections are competing actively for global awards and give huge publicity locally to individual awards. N. K. Mitra, formerly ONGC Director (Offshore) and SPE Mumbai Section Chairman, received the 2008 SPE Distinguished Member Award. The award recognizes SPE members who have attained eminence in the petroleum industry or the academic community, and/or have made unusually significant contributions to SPE. Distinguished Member status is limited to a mere 1% of SPE professional members. Mr. Mitra's contribution to the E&P profession and his accomplishments at the helm of ONGC's offshore portfolio earned him this coveted distinction. Also, four members from India received Century Club awards last year, recognizing recruitment of 100 or more new members: from the Mumbai Section, Messrs. Mitra, S. Hati, and R. K. Dewal, and from the India Section, Mr. C. Dass. As I have found in all regions visited to date, India would like more regional Distinguished Lecturers. The Indians are very proud that Sidhartha Sur, general manager of heavy oil at the Institute of Reservoir Studies, ONGC, in Ahmedabad, has been selected as a Distinguished Lecturer for 2009–10. He will talk about in-situ combustion. Other hot topics in India currently include second-generation biofuels, technology transfer in carbon capture and storage, coal gasification, clean coal technologies for power, energy efficiency, and deepwater exploration technology. I have spoken a lot this year about the importance of SPE regional councils, which are advisory bodies that are very important in helping regions act locally while thinking globally. The India National Council was set up in 2008 and has laid a firm foundation for helping members in India pursue common interests. The council coordinates sections' Distinguished Lecturer requests, scheduling of SPE workshops, and membership recruitment efforts, and facilitates sharing of best practices among sections. Elections are due this summer to nominate a new chairman and broaden the board of directors.

As is the case globally, Indian members especially value SPE as a leading resource for technical knowledge to enhance performance. For the future, they hope to arrange more Applied Technology Workshops.

India is just one of several areas that will play an increasingly important role in SPE, and vice versa. Strong membership growth is also seen today in the Middle East, particularly from student membership. Other top growth areas over the last 5 years have been Russia, Africa, and Northern Asia Pacific. We are expecting to see growth in Canada as well. We periodically see shifts in SPE growth because SPE goes where the industry is, responding to the needs of industry professionals to provide both local-specific and global resources. We are where you need us to be!

As usual, I look forward to hearing your thoughts and ideas on the President's Forum at www.spe.org. **JPT**



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