

A green EULAR 2017 takes over IFEMA

It is one of the continent's XXL congresses, an essential moment in the healthcare world, which gathered 14,300 professionals. The EULAR congress brought together doctors, scientists, health professionals and representatives from the pharmaceutical industry around the world, from 14th to 17th of June. Quite an organisation challenge! We spoke with Antonio Guadagnoli of MCI Group, OPC who was in charge of organizing the congress and we review some of the highlights of the same.



Exhibition area. Large stands and striking designs are key to draw the congressman's attention to the stands. So the stands featured elements that transmitted the identity of the exhibitor through music, rest areas with wifi and connections to charge smartphones, working areas, coffee and drinks, virtual reality animations to fully understand the various products and their healing impact, etc. An example: Roche's booth was inspired by nature, with pink trees and country sounds. Pharmaceutical company Otezla imitated the European cafés including the typical terraces, with stone-style flooring and vintage walls, where congressmen could enjoy a coffee while keeping informed about the products. Innovation is galore in a large congress like this one.

The congress included more than 70 stands of pharmaceutical companies, medical devices, associations and non-profit organizations. The largest? 300m2. Antonio tells us "that despite recent fears and caution, the exhibition area has remained stable in the last five years, with some exhibitors exploiting technology to create new experiences. Indeed, 15-20% do it through 3D technologies or virtual learning". In relation to the investment in marketing, "they have started to invest in quality marketing, with the objective to contact and create meaningful interactions, instead of generating more contacts but superficial ones," says Antonio.

BOOTHS ARE KEY TO ATTRACTING ATTENDEES, AND TECHNOLOGY AND ORIGINAL SETTINGS ARE OFTEN USED FOR THAT PURPOSE



Speakers' corners... on the stands. This format is increasingly used in congresses make it possible to offer moments of close communication, but also to ensure a great variety of sessions. And some exhibitors offer "meet the experts" sessions on their stands during the breaks.

Connected. During a congress, having the mobile or tablet is essential, so EULAR installed "mobile dormitories" in different areas so delegates can charge their device in a locker.

Headsets. Overbooking in a room? To prepare for this possibility, the congress included additional rooms where delegates could see and listen to the speaker on headphones in several languages with screens transmitting the presentations in real time. An option that is highly demanded by the variety of nationalities among congressmen.

FARMA COMPANIES INVEST IN QUALITY MARKETING AND CREATE MEANINGFUL INTERACTIONS, INSTEAD OF GENERATING MORE, SUPERFICIAL CONTACTS

Paper still holds on. We all thought apps were going to replace the paper, but it is not so obvious anymore. The lack of space on smartphones, the need for delegates to get used to its functions, and perhaps the concept that an app has to be used for more than three days make the paper remain interesting. This congress includes a daily publication, brochures and still personal information point. Antonio gives us further information: "8,000 newspapers printed in total and an average of 1,500 read a day; 2,300 poster presentations, and more than 800 presentations in other formats."

Another aspect of this paper resistance is posters. If a few years ago the trend was towards virtual posters, here the posters were printed, for several reasons. According to Antonio, "creating an adequate number of screens to match the service provided by classic posters would cost 2 to 3 times more. Also, many customers feel the face-to-face interaction provided by printed posters is crucial to the delegate's experience, quality and content of the event". Antonio says "the trend seems to be to mix both solutions: to keep the most important posters on paper for standard presentation and face-to-face interactions as they publish the lower quality posters on electronic format".

Team / hostesses. More attention is being paid to hostesses “150 bilingual hostesses were in charge of attending requests and questions of delegates: they were given a day of training so that they could meet the expectations of the congress”, says Antonio. How did they communicate with each other? “Walkie talkie for general communications (including specific sub-groups) and whatsapp for small groups or for in-team communications”, says Antonio.

A tour of the history of the congress. Taking advantage of the transit areas between the rooms and auditoriums, the congress included posters to explain the history of the congress, a way to celebrate its 70th anniversary.

8,000 SHOW DAILIES PRINTED, 2,300 POSTER PRESENTATIONS, 800 PRESENTATIONS IN OTHER FORMATS

Communication strategy. Social networks were widely used by the press agency, representatives of associations, and individuals. “They generated more than 11,000 visits to the congress website, and the social networks of the association reached more than one million people”. A communication strategy which included SEO, an email campaign, digital marketing campaigns and social media (Linkedin, Twitter and Facebook).

A special dinner. In the historic Castillo de Viñuelas, delegates could enjoy local flavors in a protected natural area that allowed the observation of wild animals and birds. The dinner brought together professionals from all over the world to offer great networking, including artistic performances, although this was “strictly limited by the professional codes of conduct of laboratories”. A small live band also performed different styles of music to accompany the phases of the dinner (welcome cocktail, speeches, dinner, after dinner).

The role of MCI. “MCI is the main PCO and full service provider for the congress, and manages all logistics, financial, commercial and marketing aspects of the congress on behalf of and under the control of EULAR, as well as 360° services for the complete organization of the congress. IFEMA has been a great support: Antonio recognizes that IFEMA “is an excellent and very competitive partner. The services reached the expected level and the collaboration with the IFEMA team was excellent”. And Madrid is “a destination to recommend”.

A partnership of green minds

“Both EULAR and MCI are aware of the environmental, economic and social impact of holding a large congress, and work with their partners to ensure that environmental, economic and socially friendly policies are in place,” says Antonio. Let’s review some of the actions related to sustainability:

- Healthy food. All buffets offered healthy choices, with a selection of fresh fruit or vegetables. Also options for various diets were available, and local products were prioritized.
- Printing. EULAR kept printing to a minimum. All abstracts and the 2018 programme were available online. This saved the impression of about 24 million pages.
- Local suppliers. EULAR and MCI wanted to have a positive local impact. “Priority was given to local partners to avoid a negative impact on transportation and to positively impact the local economy”, says Antonio.
- People with disabilities. The space was designed with the idea of offering the same congress experience to all attendees. All rooms and conference areas were fully accessible to participants with disabilities. Quiet areas were available throughout the conference grounds, mainly within the EULAR Village.
- Recycling. Throughout the congress, there were many hints to invite delegates to recycle badges at the exit and the congress bags, if they wished.

THE HOSTESSES ARE PROFESSIONALS TRAINED IN SEVERAL LANGUAGES BEFORE THE CONGRESS

