

# cim

**Australasia's leading  
business events magazine**

**ISSUE 6 2016**



# Western wonder

- Perth digs deep
- L.A. as never before
- Brisbane's new world

**PARKROYAL Parramatta**

# The future of conferences

The one constant in life is that everything changes and that is just as true for the meetings sector. Gihan Perera talks about the five key changes to the role of conferences.

The NSW Government recently announced a trial of in-ground “traffic lights” at key intersections in the CBD, to warn pedestrians on mobile phones who don’t look up while crossing the road.

NSW Centre for Road Safety executive director Bernard Carlon, said, “in our society, things have changed”.

The same principle applies to conferences. Despite the growth of videoconferencing, online meetings, telepresence and virtual reality, in-person conferences still have a place.

But the role of the conference has changed. Good conference organisers adapt to these changes, and great conference organisers embrace them and see them as opportunities.

Here are five key changes to the role of the conference.

reconnect with peers and colleagues. In fact, for many people that’s one of the most valuable benefits of a conference.

Good conference organisers already know the importance of creating spaces during the conference for networking and



## 4 From physical to hybrid

Online events aren’t the enemy of in-person conferences. They can enhance and extend the overall experience.

Good conference organisers create hybrid events by adding online components before and after the conference.

Great conference organisers treat the combination of online and in-person events as part of one continuous learning journey. They ask speakers to provide additional online resources in a variety of formats (written, audio, video, interactive); capture key takeaways and drip-feed them by e-mail to delegates post-conference; help each participant create their own “Personal Learning Network” for ongoing actions.

## 5 From closed door to open access

In an increasingly open, social, and public world, participants and clients expect – and sometimes demand – access to share, Like, rate, review, comment on, and mash up the conference material.

Good conference organisers allow opportunities for participants to chat, contribute and collaborate with each other.

Great conference organisers look beyond the list of delegates and tap into the extended community for conversation and collaboration. They use the conference Twitter hashtag to spark conversations, ask (and answer) questions, and invite input and feedback – even from people who aren’t at the conference; and provide a live stream of selected sessions, enable anybody to comment; and selectively share material publicly – such as slide decks, handouts, and online discussion forums.

### What will you do?

Audiences have changed, clients have changed, and business has changed. Are you willing to change as well?

**Gihan Perera** is a futurist, conference speaker, author and consultant.

## 1 From skills to shifts

One of the main benefits of attending a conference was to learn new skills, but that’s no longer the case. There are so many channels available for learning new skills, and a conference is no longer near the top of the list.

Good conference organisers can still include skill development sessions, but they make sure they are streamed and personalised to help participants self-select the most valuable sessions.

Great conference organisers go further, and focus on shifting thinking rather than teaching skills. They plan the program around ideas, mindsets, and inspiration for new ways of thinking. For example, they choose speakers who can change the audience’s minds, and can show them “how to get there from here”; schedule sessions that encourage fearless conversations on controversial topics; and ask keynote speakers to provide breakout sessions that reinforce their key messages.

## 2 From networking to connections

People have always attended conferences for the chance to connect and

relationship building.

Great conference organisers extend this by helping attendees connect before they arrive. For example, they publish speakers’ contact details – especially their LinkedIn address – on the conference website and in the conference app; (if appropriate) publish and share delegate names and contact details as they register; and create opportunities to connect online before the conference.

## 3 From event to journey

A conference isn’t a one-off event; participants and clients now expect it to be an integrated part of their entire journey.

Good conference organisers help participants get more value from the conference material after they leave the room.

Great conference organisers create ways for participants themselves to keep the learning alive. For example, they ask speakers to suggest and provide post-conference activities that keep the learning alive after their sessions; create mastermind groups or “buddies” for participants to keep each other accountable; and host follow-up online sessions as webinars, videoconferencing, and mastermind groups.