

Sponsorships chairs' report for COLING/ACL 2006

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Overview

For Coling/ACL 2006, we started to contact potential sponsors mid-2005. As a result, we collected AU\$79,000 in combined sponsorships, exhibits and paid advertising, which is the amount we had been aiming for. The list of sponsors is as follows:

- HCSNet (Platinum).
- Macquarie University (Gold)
- CSIRO (Gold)
- Microsoft Research (Gold, incl. wireless)
- Appen (Silver, Student Volunteers)
- Google (Silver, Cocktail reception)
- XRCE (Bronze)
- AFNLP (Student Support Fund)
- ELRA (Student Support Fund)
- DSTO (Glass)
- ACS (Supporter)
- NSF (student support for the Student Research Workshop)

In addition, MSR and AFNLP provided funding for two best paper awards and 5 best reviewer awards.

Following the recommendations from 2005, the responsibility for sponsoring activities was shared between Dominique Estival (local) and Steven Krauwer (international). While it is a good idea to involve more than one person for this task, the division of labour between “international” and “local” chairs did not work as well as had been hoped for. This was in part because the local organisation had been in place before the international chair was appointed. Although there was quite a lot of interaction and collaboration, there were also a few misunderstandings about decisions which had been made earlier, especially concerning the range of possibilities for sponsorships and how it was conveyed to potential sponsors.

Following the 2005 recommendations, this year the student research workshop chair applied for and received NSF funding for the SRW. However, the grant application to the local government agency was not successful. We would still recommend trying to get funding from such sources, but to be prepared for disappointment.

General remarks and recommendations

Even though we were quite pleased by the generous contributions from a number of local and international organizations and companies, we were somewhat disappointed by our failure to attract many industrial sponsors. Some observations are in place here:

- Some (potential) sponsors were disappointed to see that part of their contribution would be redefined as a donation to the Australian tax authorities. It is difficult to give recommendations on how to deal with this issue, as the situation will be different in different countries.

- One issue probably specific to Australia was that many of the companies in the US and Europe found Australia too far away from their own markets to see any potential benefit from sponsoring. Similarly, it was very difficult to attract publishers to exhibit at this event.

Recommendation: We have no specific recommendations here, other than either not to set our expectations too high in such cases, or to find convincing arguments that **distance is not necessarily a problem.**

- In many cases our best contacts are with the research labs of major companies. It turns out that their available budgets for sponsoring are minimal or absent. In some cases they tried to contact their commercial departments, but with no success, most probably because an audience of researchers is not interesting enough for them.

Recommendation: Again we have no other recommendation than to be realistic in our expectations

- From discussions with Ken Church (Microsoft) at an early stage of our acquisition activities, it appeared that what we had on offer would not offer potential industrial sponsors the right type or the right amount of visibility. Unfortunately these discussions took place at a stage when it was too late to design a new and more effective sponsoring model.

Recommendation: We recommend to have better coordination between the various sponsorship chairs and the conference organisers at an early stage, so a common strategy can be put in place.

- One potential sponsor withdrew a few weeks before the conference, after having had their logo on the web site for several months. This was noticed by several people and caused other sponsors to complain about the “free” advertising that had been obtained in that way.

Recommendation: Only advertise sponsorships when they have actually been received.

- We used a number of lists of potential sponsors from earlier conferences and other events. As could be expected many of the companies listed there did no longer exist and even if the company still existed many of the named contacts we had were no longer there. At the same time it should be noted that nearly all successful sponsorship requests were based on personal contacts.

Recommendation: We should try to clean up the existing list of potential sponsors, and (this is the hardest bit) to keep it up to date. Has anyone ever tried a Wiki style approach to this, where ACL officials and conference organizers could enter their corrections, findings, tips, etc?

In summary, our advice to future sponsorships chairs is:

- * Appoint all the chairs, and ensure a common understanding of the strategy, earlier.
- * Start contacting sponsors early the previous year (mid-year was good).
- * The student workshop chair should continue applying for NSF funding.
- * Only advertise sponsorships that have actually been received.
- * Clean up the list of potential sponsors and make it available.

