



Conference giveaway items, useful or wasteful?

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Conference giveaways have mirrored fast fashion where items are given out, but then generally discarded after a short period of time. Shirely (2014) says, “600,000 tons of trash are turned out every year by the 60 million people who attend tradeshows.” These giveaways are often counterproductive and do less good by wasting time, money and filling landfills with cheap tchotchkes (Robbins, 2016). However, these promotional event products are the main sustaining income for the event industry and have an estimated worth over \$17 billion (McKinely, 2017). The purpose of this study is to better understand what the most useful giveaways are for the annual International Textiles Apparel Association (ITAA) conferences in order to better plan a sustainable conference regarding giveaways. McKinely (2017) suggests to prevent conference waste, organizers should first ask if the item is needed and remember to put the focus on those attending. By using a survey with past conference attendees, this study aims to fill a gap in knowledge for useful giveaways to prevent waste at future conferences.

Upon approval from the university’s Institutional Review Board, data for this study were collected using a combination of online and paper survey with ITAA members during 2017 conference. The researchers selected participants for the survey based on the criteria that they were members of ITAA and have attended a conference at some point in the past. Those members that were at the 2017 conference were able to fill out a paper or online survey and those who did not attend the 2017 conference were sent a link to the online survey. Participants were asked various multiple choice and open ended questions related to conference giveaway items such as what they found most valuable to use during the conference, what they kept and used after the conference, what they wished to be provided at the conference as a take away item, and any ideas for making the conference more sustainable.

Total 151 conference attendees participated in either online or paper survey. Descriptive analysis was applied using SPSS 24.0. Most of respondents found programs (72.1%; n=109) and name tags (67.5%; n=102) are the most useful during the conference. Respondents indicated that luggage tags (11.9%; n=18) and folder (8.6%; n=13) are the least useful items during the conference. About half of the respondents (47.6%; n=72) indicated that a bag is useful followed by pens (31.1%; n=47), note packs (30.4%; n=46), and local snacks (29.8%; n=45) during the

conference. When asked what they kept and used after the conference, respondents indicated bag (66.8%; n=101) was used the most and folder (10.5%; n=16) is the least kept and used after the conference. After bag, majority of the respondents specified that programs (42.3%; n=64) followed by pens (37.08%; n=56), note packs (27.8%; n=42), and language tags (17.8%; n=27) are kept and used after the conference. 32.4% (n=49) of the respondents were interested in participating in a clothing swap during the conference.

Some other items that are noted by the respondents that will be/were valuable to use during the conference were 'name tag and luggage tags combined', 'water bottle', 'larger name tags', 'name tags with bigger font size', 'local map', and 'USB key with abstracts'. Additionally, several of respondents noted 'Starbucks gift card' was useful during the conference. Other ideas that were suggested by respondents regarding making the conference less wasteful were providing 'water bottles', 'making program online and make it easy to search', 'post printed programs somewhere on site', 'ways to find to make less wasted food' and 'make recycle bins available'. Shirley (2014) further supports this by also suggesting "Make it easy for those in attendance to recycle".

By conducting the survey regarding conference giveaways for the ITAA annual conference, researchers gained a better understanding of the effectiveness of common giveaways provided in the past as well as attendee preferences. Survey results have provided researchers with suggestions on the most valuable items that could be included in future events and other ideas for a more sustainable conference. The result of this study provides researchers better ideas for certain types of giveaways for an upcoming conference they are planning. Follow up observations from the upcoming annual conference will allow researchers to collect attendee reflections on giveaways based on their responses. In order to create a more sustainable conference, future plans for this study include understanding other components of a conference such as presentation and exhibition supplies, trash disposal and etc. The results from this study will provide insights to other conference organizations for how to plan a sustainable conference regarding giveaways.

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