

EDITORIAL

Dental meetings: wired to interconnect

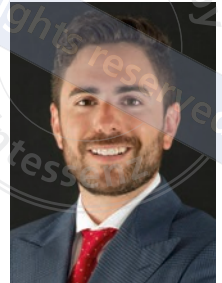
Every year, hordes of dentists flock to different dental congresses all around the globe. They travel long distances, leave their offices and families behind, and embark on a frenzy of lectures, meetings, and showrooms. This happens every year and it has been going on for decades. The ultimate question is: why?

Let us analyze the reasons for the dental congress fever and assess the validity of the assumptions.

1. Knowledge updates: Since the beginning of time, congresses have served as a source of knowledge for dentists, including the latest updates in clinical work and the most groundbreaking research. What is the newest technique for mucogingival surgery? What restorative material is in the pipeline to be introduced in the next few years? When will AI start treatment planning for us? All of these are legitimate questions, and we can expect to learn the answers at a dental congress. The greatest experts from all over the world are brought in precisely to synthesize key messages for everyone to take home. But is this the only way to access such information? Does

someone have to hop on two flights, travel hundreds of miles, and pay astronomical fees just to get access to it? Probably not. Nowadays, we can find all these answers digitally or in a journal. They can be in the form of a narrative review article, a short summary webinar, a brief YouTube video, a social media piece, and, soon enough, in the metaverse. The availability and easy-access-to-information paradox renders attending dental congresses less and less essential. Could this model be obsolete?

2. Business: In the same way that merchants performed their trade around churches and castles in the past, dentists and companies gather around dental meetings to do business. The curtain opens, and products, instruments, equipment, and technology are showcased to potential clients. In fact, the industry spends unfathomable amounts of money on huge and flashy dental stands to lure in curious dentists. Coffee and alcohol are served. Catchy slogans are used. Fancy representatives approach you with captivating smiles. A perfect setup to generate business. However, there is one small caveat. Nowadays, business is no longer as it used to be, and the desired numbers are not always reached. In recent years, companies have realized that return on investment is worsening because attendees tend to be younger, are wavier, and have less purchasing power. Industry margins have become razor thin. The piece of the business pie is more segmented, and deals are no longer only clinched at big dental meetings. What is the missed opportunity cost?



Alfonso Gil
DDS, MSc, PhD
Editor-in-Chief

Why a bone structure on the cover?

Findings from bone structure are used for the lightweight construction of buildings, where nature again serves as an important source of ideas. If steel girders in buildings are arranged according to the principle of bone beams and cavities in bones, it is possible to build in a particularly material-saving way. A prominent example of this special lightweight construction method is the Eiffel Tower in Paris.

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3. Leisure and travel: Dental meetings have always offered the perfect opportunity for getting to know new cities and combining the congress events with leisure activities. Destinations are always a key aspect that determine a meeting's turnout. Who doesn't want to go to exotic Hawaii for AO or romantic Paris for EAO? In recent years, associations have looked for ways to make their meetings more attractive and fun. This might involve sports activities like a morning run, organizing dinner events with live music or a paired wine tasting, using lecture breaks for escape rooms or raffles, and sometimes even holding the lectures in a theme park or museum. All of these ideas and initiatives are definitely important and well considered, but the reality is that attendance is in decline and congresses are struggling to retain attendee numbers. Since COVID-19, participants have dropped by half and empty venues are a common occurrence. Even though leisure is a key factor in convincing dentists to attend, if someone is looking for a weekend break or vacation, their first choice is not, should not, be a dental congress. Recreation alone is no longer enough to pull us in. So, if the pursuit of knowledge, business, or leisure activities is not the magnet that attracts us to congresses, then what is?

4. Social connections and community: Humans are social creatures who thrive on interaction with other humans. Why do researchers publish papers and articles? To have their knowledge reviewed by peers and shared amongst their colleagues. Why do you enjoy working in the clinic?

To share challenges and triumphs with your team. What does the word 'business' entail? A buyer, a seller, a product designer, and a marketing team – a two-way street of multiple connected parts. Best to travel alone or with friends or family? You know the answer.

Dental congresses are the pinnacle of social networking, where everybody meets everybody with a purpose. Dentists attend meetings to see their friends from dental school. Company representatives show up to congresses to meet their longtime clients or industry colleagues. Speakers go to lecture, not because of the money, but to gain the visibility and notoriety amongst other experts in the field. It is always about the person next to you in the lecture, at the opening dinner, or at the exhibition hall buying instruments. It is the dental community that counts. The moment you remove human interaction and connectedness, congresses are left without a soul and with no purpose. This is the reason why associations should invest the most in the human factor if they want to keep dental meetings afloat. And this is also the reason why, with the current model, a purely digital congress approach will never take off. Wired to interconnect, our dental community needs physical connection as the key ingredient to the magic recipe.

Enjoy staying interconnected!
Alfonso Gil

