

BIG Conference 2006

Business Research Means BUSINESS

The Social Scene

Spirits were high on arrival at the 2006 BIG Conference in the St. Pierre hotel and conference centre on Wednesday 17 May. Everyone looked forward not only to the papers and training workshops, but to the social programme, always a highlight of the Conference, with prospects of quizzes, golf and tennis, formal and informal dinners, to say nothing of the occasional quiet chat over a drink with friends.

Rain did not quite stop play though it did its best on the Wednesday morning at the start of the annual Golf tournament. Sponsored this year by **ID Factor**, the unpredictable weather did not prevent 12 intrepid golfers setting off on the championship golf course to compete for the prizes. **Phil Dunn** of Insight Research walked off with both the two main prizes – highest score as overall winner and “ball nearest the pin”, prizes being £2000 of research with the ID Factor and some Chateau Neuf du Pape. Bacon butties and drinks in the Trophy Bar at the end slightly compensated everyone who took part for the drowned rat feeling.

Most delegates who had booked in for the Wednesday evening arrived early evening and were able to relax at the Opening Drinks kindly sponsored by the Insight Research Show. Everyone enjoyed meeting old friends again or meeting new ones – a lot of people were attending for the first time. After dinner, an evening of entertainment followed, generously supported again this year by Critical Research – an informal evening which competed very well with the football (a screen was put up in the social area for those who wanted a foot in both camps). This year's quiz was “The Big Picture Quiz”. The quiz tested us on Movies, People, Music, Landmarks and European Countries. The winners of the champagne were **Sue Fox** and **Richard Collins**. At the end, **Henrik Hall** serenaded those who were mourning the Arsenal/Barcelona defeat, or not winning the quiz, with his guitar, and this all before the serious work of the Conference started the next day.

All tea and coffee breaks were kindly sponsored by Ciao - not only providing welcome liquid refreshments but bacon baps in the morning breaks, and Danish pastries and patisseries in the afternoon. The papers deserved attention but what a pleasure then to be able to chat at tea and coffee breaks. Luckily the gym, spa and pool at the St. Pierre hotel offer plenty of chance to burn off calories – there were plenty of opportunities to overindulge on the food front if you wanted them.

On Thursday evening following the workshops, despite intermittent cloudbursts, again a few stalwart worthies picked up their rackets and entered with spirit into the Tennis Tournament. Pulse Train Ltd sponsored the tennis for the second year running and the winners this year, to whom handsome glass trophies were awarded at the Thursday evening dinner, were **Pene Healey** and **Damon Thomas**. Congratulations to them.

The Thursday evening event promised to be good from the start – a new departure for the Conference with a Race Nite instead of just the normal Disco after the Formal Dinner. Pre-dinner drinks, thanks again to Sample Answers, were followed at 8.30pm by an excellent dinner. Half way through, **Steve Wills** announced the raffle prizes, kindly donated by many of those present. Raffle prizes included bottles of gin and Pimms, Dr Who DVDs, an adorable giraffe and a miniature working hovercraft (won by **Mark Dent** who had really wanted it – not just a fluke, he had bought LOTS of raffle tickets). Two gifts that were rather special were auctioned – a T-shirt donated by BT with James Cracknell's signature on it and two tickets for a Tom Jones show and dinner at Leeds Castle. Altogether nearly £1,400 was raised for the Market Research Benevolent Association, around half

from the raffle and the remainder by the Race Nite, some of the proceeds of which was donated to the charity rather than just to the individual punter.

The Race Nite was fun for some – but problems with the sound system initially meant that not all got into the mood. For those that did though, the six races, all shown on a big screen with commentary, gave an exciting edge to what had been a good evening. Betting slips were given against the bets on each of eight horses for each race, and neck-and-neck finishes sometimes raised and then dashed hopes. Thanks to the six companies who sponsored each of the races Accent (Chiswick Gold Cup), Kudos (White Knuckle Stakes), GfK NOP (Orange Cup), Maritz (Momentum Stakes), Rosetta Studio (Presentation Chase) and IFF Research (The Classic). After the racing, the disco started seriously and continued till late. In the early hours, by all accounts, delegates from BPRI were offering champagne (a welcome if not pre-considered company sponsorship maybe)!

The social events provide the glue that makes the Conference so very special. None of this happens though without considerable resources being made available to enable the flyers (Excel and All Global), the delegate bags (Elizabeth Norman International), the Magic Envelope (The Wire) to be offered to delegates. This sponsorship by companies provides that extra special ingredient. Thank you to the very many companies operating in the Business-to-Business arena who support the Conference every year in so many ways. The delegate bags this year contained mouse mats from GfK NOP, USB sticks from Illuminas (Incepta), instant cameras from Research International, and pens from Viewpoint. Nipo Software provided the Speaker Score Sheets.

All who went rated the Conference this year very highly on its content. But it is not the only reason we come back for more – meeting old acquaintances, renewing conversations, meeting new people, business and social networking, all are made possible by the charming environment of a manor house hotel in glorious parkland. Not that the parkland had much to add this year round – the weather made sure of that. But those of us who did attend the conference had a good and memorable time. Roll on next year!