

Midwinter Meeting Weathers Economic Storm

Attendance down 9% from 2008 meeting but 82% of exhibitors report generating new business at show



The Midwinter Meeting, the Chicago Dental Society's annual dental conference and tradeshow, consistently ranks amongst the country's top conventions, even earning the distinction as one of the top four medical tradeshows in the US last year, according to Expo magazine.

Held February 26 to March 1, this year's meeting once again attracted dental professionals from around the world, including nearly 7,000 dentists. Total attendance for the meeting was 31,333, representing a nine per cent drop over the 2008 figures, which were an all-time high in the meeting's 144-year history. "I think we all went into this meeting holding our breath a little," Dr. David Kumamoto, CDS president, said. "But the feedback from exhibitors and the number of sold-out courses reveal just how strong our meeting is." Nearly one-quarter of the conference's 240+ courses were sold out, and the vast majority of courses were near capacity.

The exhibit floor, which showcased 570 companies, was completely sold out months in advance. The Midwinter Meeting was recently chosen as offering the best cost-to-value benefit of any dental tradeshow in the US, according to 66 per cent of exhibitors responding to a post-show survey.

According to the survey of exhibitors:

- 82 per cent said they generated new business at show
- 32 per cent said the Midwinter Meeting was as good as other meetings they had attended in the last twelve months; 45 per cent said it was better
- 90 per cent said they plan to exhibit at the 2010 meeting; ten per cent were not yet sure
- 73 per cent said that they will continue with the same booth size; ten per cent said they would enlarge their booth space at 2010

While attendance in general declined by nine percent, a review of the attendance figures shows that the number of dentists attending decreased

only by seven per cent and dental hygienists by eight per cent. Below are the attendance numbers for select categories. 2008 figures are listed in parentheses for comparison: Dentists 6,983 (7,515), Dental hygienists 3,883 (4,216), Dental assistants 3,161 (3,699), Dental office personnel 2,248 (2,642), Dental technicians 369 (464), Dental students 675 (820), Dental hygiene or dental assistant students 1,603 (1,398), Dental trade 871 (1,262), Exhibitor attendees 9,061 (9,991).

The category showing the steepest decline was dental trade, which includes dental product manufacturers and distributors. This 30% drop was not unexpected, however, as attendance among this group usually falls during years in which the biennial International Dental Show in Cologne, Germany, is held. International attendance was 1,457. Although this represented a 26% drop from 2008, it was keeping with a decade-long trend in which international attendances waxes and wanes based on when the IDS is held.

The top five countries most represented at the meeting were: Canada 411, United Kingdom 241, Mexico 143, Germany 66, Japan 60.

In comparison, the top five states most represented at the meeting were: Illinois 12,047, Wisconsin 1,987, Indiana 1,749, Michigan 1,691, Ohio 561.

In 2010, the Chicago Dental Society will be moving to the west building at McCormick Place and shortening its meeting to three days. Exhibits and courses will open on Thursday morning and close on Saturday evening. With the new facility in the west building, CDS will also be able to house all courses and exhibits in one building. "These changes will make the meeting even more cost-effective and convenient for our attendees and exhibitors," Randall Grove, executive director of the Chicago Dental Society said. The society's new plans have already earned kudos from the Dental Trade Alliance, which called CDS "one of the most forward-thinking [show organizers]".