

From the Editor

EMWA 30 years and 53 conferences later

EMWA celebrates its 30th anniversary this year. For someone like me born in the 60s long before the moon landing, 30 seems a pretty young age. But if we look at some of the institutions born in the 90s, EMWA is actually in good company.

EMWA predates the European Union (EU), which was officially formed in November 1993 in Maastricht, the Netherlands. Over a year later, the European Medicines Agency opened shop in January 1995.

The International Council for Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Pharmaceuticals for Human Use (ICH), on the other hand, founded in 1990, is 2 years older.

The 90s also marked a quantum leap in technology. In those days, the terms “virtual” and “online” were not commonly used, and there were no “Apps” and “SoMe”. But the use of the internet and personal computers started to become popular.

In digging through our paper archives the other day, I stumbled upon volumes of journals and conference proceedings from the 90s, from the days when my husband (a computer scientist) and I were still PhD students. One of his papers was about a “cutting edge” platform called hypermedia system for conference

organisation (HMSCO), presented at the 1995 Education and Multimedia Annual Meeting (ED-MEDIA 95) in Graz, Austria. The publication was about harnessing the internet in organising a conference from start to finish. The high level headings of the paper are:

- Invitation and call for contributions
- Submission and review of contributions
- Registration and event preparation
- The conference event itself
- Presentations
- Scientific exchange and communication
- Social and non-scientific matters
- Post-event matters

Reads familiar? This could easily be a checklist from the last 3 virtual EMWA conferences. Through technology that started approximately 30 years ago, EMWA braved the pandemic months from 2020 to 2021, continued to serve its members through virtual educational offerings and networking events – and this journal.

The 53rd EMWA conference in Berlin will forever be remembered as the 30th anniversary gathering of medical writers and communicators in postpandemic Europe. It was fun but



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poignant, exhilarating yet humbling.

To conclude this editorial, I would like share this direct quote from the same paper:

“The main ideas behind the HMSCO are to further reduce manual work by automating repetitive tasks, to support participants and organisers at the event itself, to simplify communication, to enhance availability of resources, and to speed up the transfer of information and data.

However, the future of conferences will certainly not be all hypermedia... HMSCOs are mainly intended to aid people to meet each other, not to hold meetings in cyberspace. Conferences in the current form [in person] will remain absolutely essential and necessary. Nothing will ever replace the personal contact and the verbal, direct communication between researchers...”

I fully agree. Technology advances, viruses mutate, but humans will always be social animals. Here’s to EMWA’s next 30 years.



EMWA Editorial Board members (L-R) Evgenia Alechine, Raquel Billiones, Phil Leventhal, and Jonathan Pitt at the May EMWA conference in Berlin, Germany.