

Can you please provide a brief background on your experience with PittCon? How long have you been attending the conference, in what capacities have you served, etc.?

(Ciurczak) I have been going since 1971. Most of my trips have been as a scientist for one pharmaceutical company or another. On several occasions, I was an employee of, or consultant to, an instrument company (Bran + Luebbe, FOSS, Spectral Dimensions, Control Development).

(Mark) I don't recall exactly when I first started going to PittCon, but it was probably sometime in the mid-80s, while I was still working for Technicon. At that time my interest was strictly scientific, and I went mainly in order to attend the scientific presentations. When I became a consultant, my interests changed, and while I still tried to attend the scientific sessions, I also started paying more attention to talking to people to see where there might be a possibility to drum up some consulting work. For a long time, however, since I first started going, I have been involved with the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) and attending the ASTM meetings. Of course, I also regularly attend the meetings of the Council for Near Infrared Spectroscopy, although this year the Council didn't hold a meeting at PittCon. I also try to spend at least some time walking around the exhibit floor, seeing what new instrumentation is available that would be of interest for someone in the near infrared world.

(Sparkman) I have attended every PittCon since 1968.

Overall, how would you characterize PittCon 2005? Good, bad, disappointing, etc.? How does this compare to recent years?

(Ciurczak) My first impression was that it was smaller than in recent years. This was confirmed at the PittCon booth, where I was told that there were more vendors, but with smaller booths. I also had no trouble walking through the show; there were far fewer people than in the "good old days."

(Mark) It's hard for me to rate PittCon 2005 as good or bad because my activity this year was different from what it's been for the last few years. It certainly was not disappointing. From the commercial point of view, how good it was will not become apparent until some time has passed, and I can see what the outcome is. From the scientific point of view, I did attend a couple of papers that were of interest, but not as many as I might have liked to attend. I also came across a couple of instruments using new technologies that seemed fairly interesting. So all in all, I can say that PittCon 2005 was moderately successful for me.

(Sparkman) Overall, it was poor. The new mass spectrometry introductions, however, were the best ever.

There was some talk of this being a down year in terms of floor/booth traffic. What do you have to say about that? Do you agree/disagree? And if you agree, what factors do you feel caused this?

(Ciurczak) There seemed to be less people in attendance this year. I know for a fact that several pharmaceutical companies have cut back on travel. I assume that the business slow-down, in general, is cutting into attendance. That is everywhere, however; less tourists are visiting vacation spots, as well. I think that the way companies buy equipment is changing and large shows like PittCon are becoming less relevant.

(Mark) I met up with several people I know, who were manning their companies' booths. When I asked them how the booth traffic was for them, I got a wide variety of answers ranging from "pretty slow" to "very good." My own impression was that the aisles seemed less crowded than I'm used to seeing them. All in all, it would seem that many of the attendees were being very selective as to which booths they attended – the booths that were of general interest got a lot of traffic, and the

other ones didn't get as much as they used to.

(Sparkman) Attendance and booth traffic were both down, but the quality of leads was good. I think the cause for the downturn in attendance was the Orlando location – it offered too many distractions.

What were your impressions of this year's product introductions? What products stood out the most to you? Were you pleased with this year's overall offering?

(Ciurczak) In truth, I found that some of the smallest companies introduced some of the nicest equipment. The largest vendors just seemed to be re-arranging the deck chairs, while the “little fellows” were being innovative.

(Mark) There were two new technologies that seem interesting. Both of them were near IR spectrometers based on the use of diffraction gratings, but neither of them used the diffraction grating in the conventional way. Both of the instruments have a source, a diffraction grating, and optics that focus the diffracted light into a line. At that point, one of the instruments has a spinning disk with patterns on it that modulate each wavelength at a different frequency. The net result is the Fourier transform of the spectrum, so that this is a non-interferometric Fourier transform spectrometer. The other instrument has a set of MEMS mirrors at the place where the diffracted light is focused. And these mirrors can direct the light to the detector in patterns that are under software control. They could be used to send one wavelength at a time to the detector and generate an ordinary spectral scan. But what they actually do is to use Hadamard patterns to gain the multiplex advantage of Hadamard spectroscopy. So both instruments use diffraction gratings, but use them in a way that is much more efficient than a conventional diffraction grating spectrometer.

(Sparkman) In the past few years, new MS product introductions have occurred at the ASMS show. This year, however, there were more top-flight, new MS products than ever.

For the most part did you agree with the PittCon Editors' Award selections? (Gold Award: JEOL for its DART ionization technology for mass spectrometry. Silver Award, 3-way tie: ESA for its Corona CAD detector; Shimadzu for its LC/MS-IT-TOF; and Dionex for its ICS-3000. Bronze Award: Agilent Technologies for its HPLC-Chip ESI/MS.)

(Ciurczak) These products were nice, but merely extensions of existing product lines. I was impressed with Polychromix and its MEMS technology to create a “changing grating” that still remains stationary. Duo-Chek made a small meter that is placed between a pH meter and its electrode. It is used to diagnose which is giving the problem. It was compact, inexpensive, and filled a need. In other words: new! This is what I meant by “little fellows.”

(Mark) I didn't see any of those instruments, so I can't comment on them.

(Sparkman) I am one of the editors who selected these products.

How would you characterize the quality of this year's oral/ poster sessions/short courses? Were there any topics that were omitted or not covered enough?

(Ciurczak) I tended to avoid the oral sessions. They are becoming easy to divide into three categories: 1) vendor showcases, 2) esoteric theory (University-types), or 3) same-old, same-old. A number of sessions, like the PAT session, had the same people giving the same platitudes they already gave at IFPAC and other PAT-dominated meetings. No data or product information is ever shared.

(Mark) I didn't get to too many papers. The ones I did attend, however, were of interest to me so I considered them to be good.

(Sparkman) The oral sessions have been improving – improving to the point that they are taking time away from the exhibits. I cannot say any topics were omitted.

In terms of products, applications, short courses, poster sessions, etc., were there any trends at this year's show?

(Ciurczak) Chromatography and atomic spectroscopy dominated; environmental chemistry and some process chemistry appeared. The major disappointment was the dearth of NIR papers. Other than the Hirschfeld Award session, very, very few were presented. The Eastern Analytical Symposium (EAS) has 5-7 NIR sessions, and a similar number for Chemometrics, and it is less than half the size of PittCon. My guess is that the major PittCon organizers, being from Pittsburgh (Alcoa, PPG), do mostly chromatography and atomic spectroscopy. They are not as involved with vibrational spectroscopy as the New Jersey organizers of EAS are.

(Sparkman) There were no trends, except that PittCon offers too many short courses of poor quality. This takes away from the exhibits and does a disservice to the attendees.



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