

Evaluation of POWER Cluster Business Networking events

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This report is based on an evaluation of five POWER cluster offshore wind business networking events. The evaluation was conducted by David Wood of Suffolk County Council and based on attendance of events, evaluation reports by Offshore Centre Denmark, Windcomm & EEEGR and feedback from businesses.

The report was prepared as part of the POWER (Pushing Offshore Wind Energy Regions) cluster project. POWER cluster is part-financed by European ERDF funding through the Interreg IVB North Sea Programme. Further information at www.power-cluster.net

1. Introduction

- 1 This report evaluates the 5 main business networking events during the POWER cluster project. The audience for this document is POWER cluster partners thus an understanding of the POWER cluster project is assumed. This evaluation includes a guide from the POWER project (the predecessor to POWER cluster) about organising international one to one networking events (Appendix 1 & 2). There were two types of networking events organised through POWER cluster: traditional networking through a conference (e.g. SNS 2009) and one to one networking events (e.g. OWIB 2010). One to one networking events are where delegates book meetings with other individuals in advance. They last for a predetermined amount of time (normally between 5 and 20 minutes).

2. Evaluation of events

2.1 SNS Conference and Innovation Awards 2009 (Norwich, UK)

- 2 POWER cluster partners participated in the Innovation Awards Gala Dinner which took place the day before the SNS conference. This enabled them to meet with businesses from across the East of England.
- 3 The Sothern North Sea (SNS) Conference is an annual event which takes place in the East of England and is organised by EEEGR (East of England Energy Group). POWER cluster partners attended the SNS 2009 as part of the transnational meeting in the East of England. The conference focused on three key elements: gas, wind and investment with a significant amount of time devoted to networking (in excess of two and half hours). This enabled delegates to learn about developments in the offshore energy industry while still making new contacts.
- 4 It would have been beneficial to have more non UK businesses at the event. However there were a number of high profile speakers and delegates including Seajacks and Subsea UK which is a good output for the project.

Table to show event statistics from SNS 2009

Event Statistics (SNS 2009)	Number
Male Delegates	126
Females Delegates	20
Businesses	102

2.2 OWIB 2009 (Esbjerg, Denmark)

- 5 Offshore Wind Business2Business event (OWIB) is an annual one to one networking event dedicated towards making contacts and contracts within the offshore wind industry. The event is organised by Offshore Centre Denmark. It's an alternative to traditional conferences and exhibitions, where the right people can often be difficult to find. At OWIB, participants had the opportunity to pre book meetings with participating companies, maximizing efficiency.

- 6 The event was run in collaboration with a German conference hosted in Husum the day before. Delegates were able to sign up to both events for a set price. An introduction to OWIB was followed by presentations about Danish and German offshore wind. In the afternoon there were a number of one to one meetings. Each meeting lasted ten minutes. In the evening there was a tour of the port followed by dinner where delegates could make more contacts through informal networking.
- 7 There were companies from a number of countries including: Denmark, UK, Germany, and USA. However the majority of delegates were from Denmark. There were several high profile companies at the event including Siemens and A2Sea. 200 meetings took place and a number of companies won contracts as result of attending OWIB 2009 which is an excellent outcome.

Table to show event statistics from OWIB 2009

Event Statistics (OWIB 2009)	Number
Male Delegates	54
Females Delegates	6
Businesses	41
Number of new contacts made	500

2.3 SNS 2010 & Innovation Awards (Norwich, UK)

- 8 There were two POWER cluster tables at the Innovation Awards Gala Dinner. This event enabled informal networking to take place. One table was hosted by a local politician and the other by senior officer from Suffolk County Council. Across the two tables there were a total of 13 different businesses.
- 9 The SNS conference took place the following day. It focused on three key areas: wind, gas and investment. The programme included a presentation about POWER cluster and dedicated more than 2.5 hours to networking. This enabled delegates to learn about some of the opportunities from the offshore energy industry while meeting new contacts.
- 10 Partners from POWER cluster were encouraged to invite businesses to both the SNS 2010 and Innovation Awards. Despite this it would have been beneficial to have more non UK businesses at the event. POWER cluster partners suggested that the agenda for SNS was too widely focused to encourage participation from businesses in their regions. Specifically part of the agenda would not be relevant for some businesses from the offshore wind industry. However the event led to a significant number of new contacts and a large amount of reconnections between existing contacts.

Table to show event statistics from SNS 2010

Event Statistics (SNS 2010)	Number
Male Delegates	180
Females Delegates	31
Businesses	85

Number of new contacts made	190
Number of re-connects with existing contacts	205

2.4 Moving up the Supply Chain 2010 (Aberdeen, UK)

- 11 This was a one to one networking event which was held as part of the POWER cluster mid term conference which was part of All Energy. All Energy is the largest renewable energy conference in Europe with more than 7,000 delegates attending the 2010 event.
- 12 EEEGR co-ordinated the event. Delegates of All Energy could turn up on the day or book in advance. The event took place on the second day of All Energy. This event was promoted at the POWER cluster stand and to exhibitors of All Energy.
- 13 There was a total of 35 meetings arranged which was a good output for the project. However the location of the meetings had little passing trade and was a fair walk from the main exhibition area.

Table to show event statistics from Moving up the Supply Chain (2010)

Event Statistics (Moving up the Supply Chain)	Number
Male Delegates	33
Females Delegates	3
Businesses	24

2.5 OWIB 2010 (Esbjerg, Denmark)

- 14 OWIB 2010 was the new name for Offshore Centre Denmark's one to one networking event. It built on the success of the previous event (OWIB, 2009) and as a result the event was held in a larger venue and included a small exhibition. Unlike OWIB 2009 there was only a short introduction to the event. This focused on how to make the most of the short meetings.
- 15 Suffolk County Council co-ordinated a small delegation of companies from the East of England (4 companies attended with another having a virtual presence).
- 16 Meetings in the morning lasted 10 minutes and 20 minutes in the afternoon. The event was followed by a dinner whether there were opportunities for informal networking. There were more high profile companies (e.g. Siemens, Vestas and Dong Energy) and a greater number of non Danish companies at the event than in 2009. Although the majority of companies were from Denmark. OWIB 2010 resulted in 640 one to one meetings. This is an excellent outcome and more than trebled the number of meetings from 2009.

Table to show event statistics from OWIB 2010

Event Statistics (OWIB 2010)	Number
Male Delegates	116
Females Delegates	11
Businesses	82

Number of new contacts made	1620
Number of re-connects with existing contacts	555

2.6 OBMC 2010 (Husum, Germany)

- 17 OBMC (Offshore Business Meetings & Conference) is a new brand and offshore event developed and organised by Windcomm, the network agency for wind energy in Schleswig-Holstein; Germany's northernmost state. It built on the success of the previous event (OBMC, 2009). In 2010 there were two parts to the event, an international conference and international B2B (business to business) meetings, intended to provide attendances with first-hand information and to facilitate national and international contacts.
- 18 The international conference which took place on November 8 covered topics which had to date been sparsely dealt with. The conference programme included sessions about innovative offshore foundation structures, latest service and maintenance concepts, fire-fighting and safety concepts as well as offshore training and education programmes. The B2B meetings on November 9 provided a confidential atmosphere in which attendances had the chance to build networks with leading international companies from the offshore sector and to present innovative products and services.

Table to show event statistics from OBMC 2010

Event Statistics (OBMC 2010)	Number
Male Delegates	118
Females Delegates	6
Businesses	87

2.7 Statistics for all POWER cluster events

Table to show the statistics from All business networking events

Event Statistics (All Events)	Number
Male Delegates	627
Females Delegates	77
Businesses	421
Number of new contacts made	2310
Number of re-connects with existing contacts	760

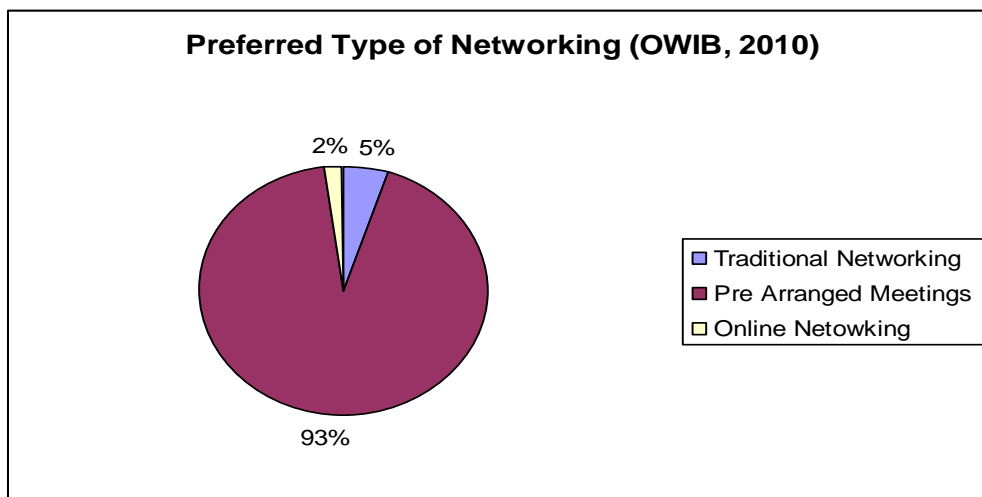
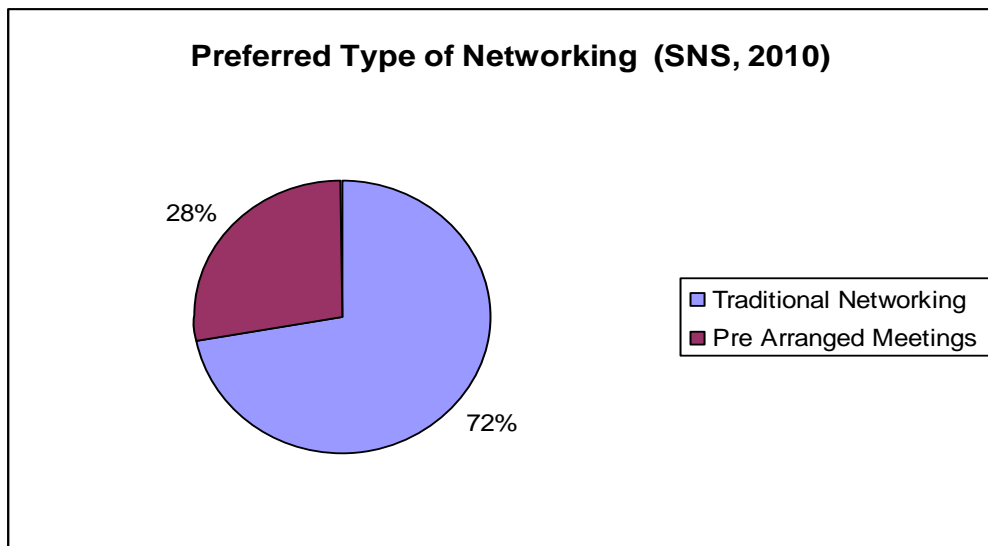
3. Competition from other events

- 19 Since the POWER cluster project started in June 2008 there has been a massive expansion in the number of events organised specifically for the offshore wind industry. The majority of these events are conferences which are often accompanied by exhibitions. This competition means that any new events needs to either offer something different from this or be very well marketed. Despite this the most popular events relevant to the offshore wind industry have remained largely unchanged and their delegate numbers

continue to grow. These events tend to be organised by industry associations e.g. EWEA, Renewable UK, etc.

Traditional Networking versus Pre Arranged meetings

20 There was a debate within partners over which type of networking is preferred by businesses. It is not as black and white as you might think. For example one company informed me that one of his best meetings was as a result of randomly meeting someone at a dinner party. However a company's time is valuable i.e. you do not want to turn up to an event on the off chance that he might meet someone appropriate.



21 The above pie charts provide an indication of companies preferred networking method. Although the results are influenced by the type of event i.e. delegates result was consistent with the type of event they had attended. The above results also suggest that non UK companies prefer one to one networking and UK companies traditional networking. However feedback from OWIB 2010 participants (including UK representatives) contradicts this. Further investigation is required to confirm the preferred type of networking and any potential cultural differences.

Lessons Learned

22 A guide to organising international one to one networking events is included in the Appendix. This was produced as part of the POWER project. Further lessons learned through POWER cluster are outlined below:

1. Consider having a side event at a pre existing conference rather than organising something separate. There are number of high profile events such as EWEA. A lot of already be planning to attend these events which make attracting delegates to your event easier.
2. Any additional event should have a clear USP (unique selling point) from pre existing events. For example the main focus of OWIB 2010 was on pre arranged meetings.
3. Allow at least ten minutes for each pre arranged meetings. Ideally it should be 15 minutes per meeting.
4. Work with partners from other countries to co-ordinate a small delegation of companies from other countries and help promote the event. This will help ensure participation from a larger number of countries.
5. Target businesses from specific countries. Trying to target all of the North Sea Region of Europe would require a significant marketing resource (either time or money).
6. Attendance from offshore wind businesses tends to be better at events aimed specifically at this industry
7. At the start of the event explain the concept of one to one networking and how delegates can get the most out of it.

Conclusions

23 The business networking events organised by POWER cluster have been a successful way of enabling businesses to make new contacts. However the number of events organised by companies has increased significantly since POWER cluster commenced in 2008. This means that any new event needs to have a clear USP (unique selling point) and/or significant investment in marketing. One of the key lessons learned is to collaborate with partners who can co-ordinate and help promote the event. An area for future investigation would be to have a clearer understanding of how people prefer to network. This would enable events to be tailored to suit individual preferences. Currently the vast majority of events are focused on traditional networking.

Appendix 1: Guidelines for organising international one to one networking events*

Pre-Event

1. Clearly market event with a full programme to include deadlines for registration for one to one meetings and state that meetings are strictly “first come first served”.
2. Marketing to include how many meetings will be available for each company and how long they will last – you can hold three 15 minutes meetings with a five minute turn around/ run over period in an hour.
3. Consider to restrict the maximum number of delegates to make the event more manageable and focussed.
4. Try to ensure attendance of some key industry players (e.g. for offshore wind: turbine manufacturer and developers) and their availability for one-2-one meetings. Try to get their commitment early on in the planning process, as their involvement will increase the interest from service companies to join the event.
5. Obtain short paragraph about each company that wishes to participate in one to one meetings.
6. Allow companies from all participating countries to book one to one meetings with their international counterparts, via the organisers of the event.
7. All delegate booking to be clearly dated to enable fair timetabling on a first come first served basis.
8. No timetable to be produced until registration for meetings has been closed.
9. In case of companies being unable to attend or over subscription, time has to be allowed to reschedule any timetables and invite companies to make alternative appointments.

*Source POWER Good Practise Guide for organising international business networking events, 2007

10. All timetables to be produced and published to the individual companies three days prior to the event. When timetables published they are classed as fixed.
11. All presenters to be set time limits for presentations and agree a method of a “Five Minute Warning” and a “Wrap Up” signal (for example referee whistle or bell).
12. Visit venue to decide room layout. If unable to use separate room from presentations for meetings need to leave at least half an hour for setting up between two activities.
13. Produce delegate packs to include clear floor/table plans and simplified timetables for each company.
14. Produce large floor/table plans and master timetable for clear display on the day of the event.
15. Meet with team one day prior to event to go over procedures and share floor plans and master timetables.

At the event

1. Clearly signpost all rooms and tables.
2. Ensure that all presentations run to time.
3. Clearly brief all delegates immediately before meetings begin on the procedures for the networking session, in particular for timekeeping i.e. verbal “Five Minute” and “Wrap Up” warnings.
4. Prior to meetings clearly brief all participants of room locations and layouts as well as location of large floor plans for reference.
5. Ensure that all team members are aware of responsibilities on the day and are happy to answer any questions from delegates
6. Consider finishing the one to one networking session with a short debriefing presentation.

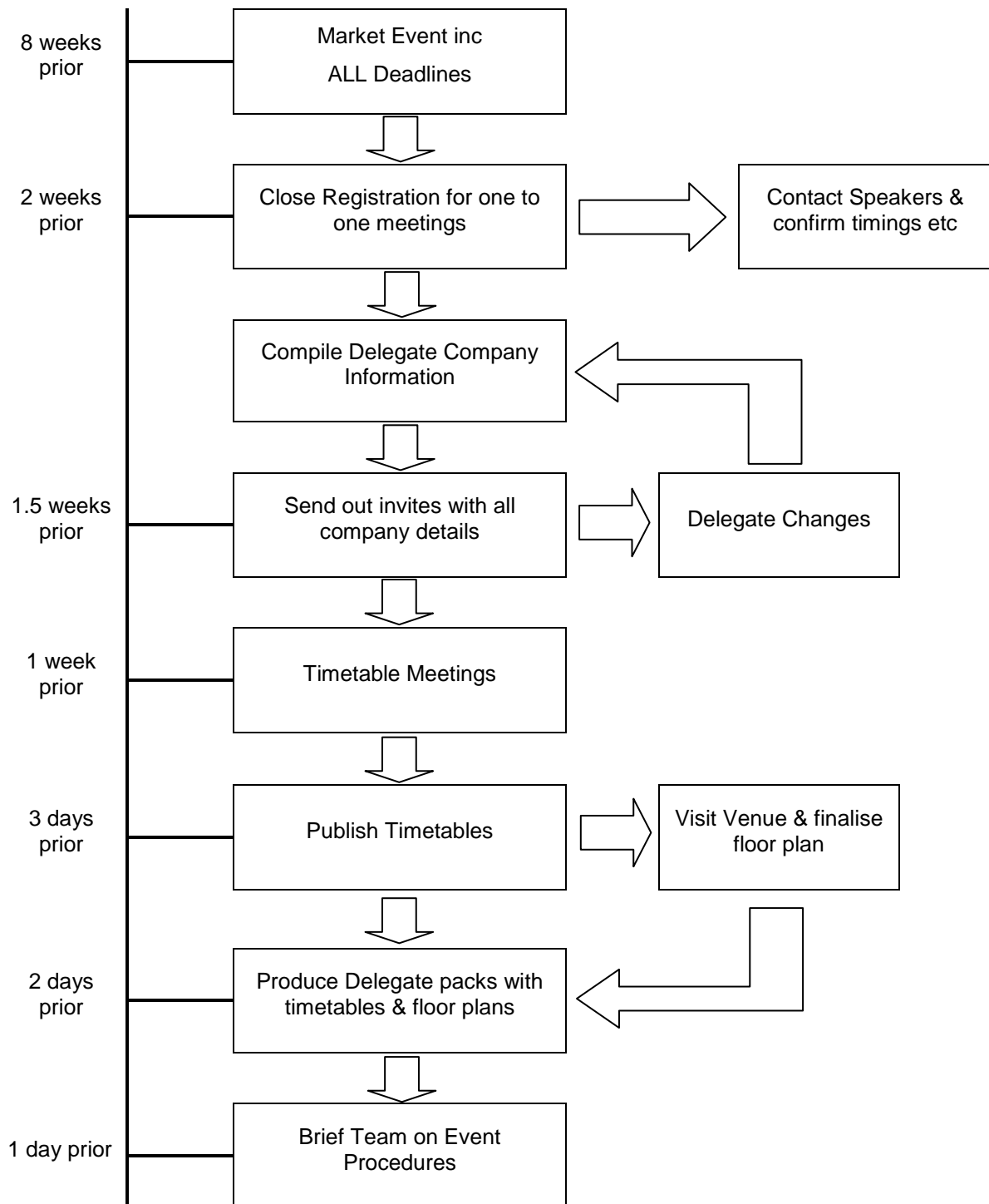
Venue specific considerations:

1. Ideally, there should be a room for the one to one networking separate to the venue for presentations. This room should ideally be set up in café-style.
2. Ideally, the event is located in or close to the hotel of the delegates. If it is not, it would be useful for those who might not have a full programme of one-2-one meetings, to have a cafe or similar in the building where they could relax or work in relative comfort. If not, it should be considered to organise a shuttle bus after an hour of one-2-one meetings.

Additional comments

1. Feedback shows that for the visiting delegation, the experience of travelling together to the event was beneficial, as sometimes businesses from the same region would meet the first time. The opportunity to socialise with businesses from the same region was valued.
2. As part of such an event, the organisation of a dinner open to all delegates opens additional opportunities for networking – often the best business relationships develop while socialising.

Appendix 2: Process flowchart against a timeline*



*Source POWER Good Practise Guide for organising international business networking events, 2007