Hertfordshire Branch

Committee Report for 2012 - 2013

The Committee has pleasure in presenting this report on the Branch's activities.

The new Committee (with three newcomers) delivered the 2012-13 programme of 10 events focused on increasing attendances for branch events at our venues in Hemel Hempstead (Steria Limited) and Hatfield (University of Hertfordshire-UH).

Branch Events

Our season had a perfect start in October with 'The Perfect Storm: Population, Development & Climate Change' with Professor Maslin from UCL discussing the challenges facing our world. This was at our new venue, University of Hertfordshire's College Lane Campus. We recorded an attendance of 102 (70 non-Members), the largest number for a Branch Event at BCS Herts.

We had decided to alternate our events between our two venues and this meant that our November event took place at Steria in Hemel Hempstead. This event was led by a former Committee Member, Mike Barwise, who gave his thoughts on 'Is Information Security Really Hard?' and stimulated an interesting debate with the audience.

Our December event went back in time to World War 2 with our speaker Alan Wray, a volunteer in Bletchley Park's Bombe Rebuild project, who described the development, adoption and operation of the Enigma machine and how the Bombe fitted into the overall breaking of the Enigma at Bletchley Park ('The German Enigma, the Turing British Bombe and the Bombe Rebuild'). This was a good follow up to our visit to Bletchley Park during our 2011-12 season.

2013 started with 'Faster than a Speeding Bolt: How the card in your pocket works', thanks to Lewis Graham from Visa Europe who explained how millions of merchants and thousands of banks co-operate to provide a safe and secure service.

The University of Hertfordshire has provided us with speakers over the years, and Hajrë Hyseni, Senior Lecturer at the University made a welcome return in February, this time presenting on the subject 'The Power of Mobile Commerce'. He described how mobile phones will become an increasingly important part of daily life used by millions of people and businesses around the world.

The demand for increasingly sophisticated IT systems is leading to trouble-shooting and stability problems. Our March speaker, Paul Offord suggested an approach by creating a service-orientated Problem Solving Group (PSG).

Our speakers, Tony Rogers and Laurie Young in April tackled the challenge of relying on products alone to deliver business growth by the use of services to generate profitable and stable revenue streams ('Servitisation and the opportunities it can afford to organisations: Are you missing out?').

'Get better Business Results from ICT enabled projects using Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)' was the topic of our May event where NLP experts Rob Harley and Linda Marshall involved those present in a very active and interactive session to explain the key principles of NLP.

We returned to the UH campus for the final Branch event ('Information: Currency of Life?') for the year where UH's own Daniel Polani described how information can act as a "currency" organising cognitive load in agents via various optimisation principles, such as a principle of "informational economy".

Our visit for this year combines with our AGM, and we return after 5 years to the Secret Nuclear Bunker, the biggest and deepest nuclear bunker in South East England that is open to the public. The bunker was initially an RAF ROTOR Station and latterly a Regional Government Headquarters, with a brief period in the 1960s as a civil defence centre.

Attendance at our Events

Average attendance for the year, excluding the AGM, was 47 (2007 to 2012 averages 31, 29, 33, 24, 25, 29) which is a significant increase on previous years. Analysing the figures we had an average of 29 (4 events: Member/non-Member split 25/4) at Hemel Hempstead and an average of 61 at Hatfield (5 events: Member/non-Member split 30/31). It is acknowledged that some members prefer one location over the other and as such the Committee wants the Branch to be more accessible to the wider membership with a dual venue approach. In addition, the Committee wants to be linked with both academia (UH @ Hatfield) and business (Steria at Hemel Hempstead) to maintain a healthy balance. The Branch is leveraging technology such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter to better publicise events.

Adding Value beyond Branch Events

The Branch link with UH has not been limited using the location for events. The Committee (Senior UH staff part of the Committee) has worked closely with the University in awarding two prizes to final year students for Innovation and Collaboration, each receiving £100 prize and membership paid for BCS membership.

Members of the Committee have gone further to support the BCS in general with contributions to the Best Practice forum and presenting on 'How to Leverage Commercial Sponsorship for Members Groups' at BCS Spring Conference.

In addition to our established web-site, a new Facebook page for the branch was set up in January https://www.facebook.com/BcsHertfordshireBranch . This has proved a valuable channel of communication with members and non-members for promoting our events, publicising video recordings of our events and getting members' feedback on topics of discussion. Currently running at over 100 "likes", and growing, the Facebook page shows an interesting demographic of over 35% under 34s leading us to be encouraged that we are reaching a younger audience of members or potential members. Topics that have generated the greatest "viral" interest (i.e. bringing in new members) have been Robotics and Artificial Intelligence (6% viral) and Computing History (3% viral), these Facebook statistics are useful in guiding our choice of topics for future events.

Recording Thanks

We wish to record our gratitude to the speakers for their enthusiasm, to Steria Limited and the University of Hertfordshire for their continuing sponsorship of events, to HQ for support and advice, to our members for supporting our events and providing us valuable feedback and to our colleagues on the committee, with special thanks to our Secretary Sarah Jacklin who is stepping down from the Committee.

The Coming Year- Programme 2013-14

The Committee has worked hard by consulting our members during spring and summer months to develop our Programme 2013-14 for the Branch with 8 Branch Events (using both Hemel Hempstead and Hatfield venues) and 2 Visits (including the AGM). The Committee hopes our members would enjoy participating and support us in building a stronger BCS Hertfordshire.

If anyone would like to join the Committee we would ask them to volunteer at the appropriate point in the AGM proceedings.