

Chairman's request for input on the RSGB convention

UK Microwave group response

Introduction

Amateur Radio, certainly as represented by the RSGB and to some extent the UKuG, has turned-in on itself: it's becoming a domain of "boys playing with expensive toys." It has been said that the convention sometimes gives the impression (perhaps wrongly) of the RSGB talking to itself.

Target market

As currently arranged, the Convention seems to be aimed just at existing licensed radio amateurs. It contains little or nothing for the absolute beginner, or for prospective members from other scientific /engineering based hobbies. The exception seems to be that you can take your Foundation Exam there, and that is to be applauded. Maybe the RSGB should review its target market and find their "hot buttons" by considering what non-radio science and technology touches on radio. Computing, astronomy, model engineering, and geophysics are some examples but there are no doubt others. In order to attract members from across and outside the Society, the content should open up new opportunities across the hobby, encourage people to try something new, and be challenging.

Above all it should aim to dispel the image of the hobby as a bunch of overweight old farts living in a world of nostalgia, and move it towards that of "citizen scientists and engineers".

On a specific point, Amateur radio doesn't necessarily have to involve a transmitter. There are many examples of this such as the work done by Paul Marsh MOEYT on space probe reception, so there should be no attitude of treating receive-only players as second class citizens.

Talk content

Judging by the well attended/over subscribed talks over the last two years, particularly 2E0SQL's Raspberry Pi and G4SWX's remote operation talks, there is clearly a thirst for finding about "new stuff" outside the conventional DXpedition reports and general interest areas, and this should be expanded. There should therefore be a continued reduction in the number of backward-looking talks, "the history of," "60 years of" "Valve HF linear Amplifiers" etc, leave these to local radio clubs and the web. There should be more focus on making Amateur radio look more like a good scientific hobby. Many of the DXpedition talks seem to be a series of "holiday slides" rather than focussing on the technology in some detail. Much foreknowledge is assumed, such as, how DO you run six stations in the same field, each running a kilowatt without getting mutual interference? What is the best way to approach an hotel owner to ask if you can run stations in their back garden or on their beach?

Professor Cochrane's recent talk and articles highlight that we need very much more considered thought about the future of the hobby, but there is some doubt that Cochrane's articles actually represent a useful way forward. It could be argued that his ideas about moving from the frequency space to the code space are more suited to

network operation than experimentation and there's still only limited spectrum available! A follow up to his talk and articles is badly needed, but one that gives real practical designs and ways forward to implement some of his ideas. Not general theory; we are not all professors, we need ideas that people can go away and try on-air and determine the validity of his proposals, very much like the practical designs that were published in the mid 20th century during the move from AM to SSB.

The group would like to see the practical experience side opened up more - we've had the CW challenge/university for ages, the contest university etc (all focussed on operating skills; on the ability to make 400 QSOs an hour and seeing this as the ultimate aim in Amateur radio. We should try to 'showcase' other aspects of the hobby better, maybe with more scheduled demonstrations such as the live EME demo a few years ago. One suggestion is that, for the beginners and 'outsiders' looking at what amateur radio could offer them, a group of radio amateurs who have been in the hobby for a while and are now looking at other activities within the hobby, could talk about their experiences. The topic covered on SMT last year was very well attended for the lecture, and the practical session was relatively busy. Many delegates said they'd like to do the workshop, but had already picked the lectures they wanted to attend, because the workshop wasn't on the programme! Some form of developmental workshops should be programmed in as part of the event and clearly marked on the schedule, so that attendees can include them in their choices. The majority of people who attend have used the schedules to select what is of interest to them before they turn up at the door - so it will also help to have schedules published that reflect the timing and location activities on the day. UKuG member, G4HUP has already offered to do a follow up SMT talk and workshop this year, but I am sure there must be other topics that would be interesting and that got some practical work done.

Outreach

As was successfully achieved at the centenary at Bletchley Park last year with the Raspberry Pi project, there should be an opportunity for a schools or university students to visit for free during the convention, maybe to attend one of the practical workshops or to a special introductory talk.

Publicity

The publicity before and during the conference is poor, unless you attend you have little or no idea as to what is going on. There is no streaming, recording, Twitter or other social media feeds or proceedings from the conference, just the programme and the RadCom preview and write up. Despite this, attendance has grown year on year but we are missing a few tricks to get it in to the public eye. The bigger venue should let the RSGB push the PR more.

Summary

Words to describe the hobby, the convention, and to a large extent the Society, could include patrician, exclusive, boring, anti-technical, and expensive. Clearly the convention should try to change this view by becoming more inclusive, technical, and practical.

