

The Great European CI Summit Detour of Bears, Doughnuts, and Chemistry

By Jens Thieme and Michel Bernaiche



The SCIP European Competitive Intelligence Summit, which took place in November 2010 in Barcelona, attracted over 200 attendees from 22 different countries around the world with attendees coming from as far away as Singapore.

But this is a story about a pair of friends who trekked their way through 5 countries over 4 days in an effort to continue and build a friendship that began at a competitive intelligence gathering in Finland many years earlier. When these two unsuspecting CI leaders in their respective companies, Dunkin' Brands (the guys who feed you well even when Hotel Mom is closed for vacation) and Ciba (the former world leader in specialty chemicals, owned by BASF today), ventured to participate in that forum, little did they know about the career successes and mutual adventures that lay ahead.



A LONG FRIENDSHIP

At an international dinner event that included such delicacies as pigeon, bear salami, frog leg, and reindeer, a friendship was born that not only bridged continents but business fields as far apart as doughnuts and automotive additives. For years to come, these two thought leaders in the world of competitive intelligence would meet in nine different countries over the course of four years for one reason or another, but mostly for the good of CI.

While chemicals and breakfast coffee hardly make a tempting combination, these two remain just as passionate about competitive intelligence as they did when they first met, though the true benefit of their meeting comes to the CI community at large. Jens and Michel, as true ambassadors to the global CI cause, have always remained interested in sharing thoughts, ideas, and best practices in authoring, speaking, and work-shopping in an effort to further elevate the relevance and longevity of competitive intelligence.



ROAD TRIP TO BARCELONA

So their 2010 trip to the SCIP European Competitive Intelligence Summit in Barcelona, Spain began in Zurich, where the two, over espresso, discussed ideas around where the next Euro Summit could be in an effort to improve and further strengthen the eastern European competitive intelligence community. From there, they moved on to Bern where they had lunch and discussed the tough past two years that SCIP had experienced and their related Board duties. As daylight dwindled, they arrived in the quiet Southern Swiss Alps town of Naters where the two took part in one of their favorite traditions, toasting.

Onward, their travels took them to Lago Maggiore, Milan, Sion, Nice, Monaco, and finally Barcelona – all by car – where they enjoyed seeing old friends and meeting new ones, and the refreshing absence of air travel nuisances. Charged with excitement from these newly shared adventures and an updated tool box of fresh ideas to share with the CI community that was to gather in Barcelona, the two set out with the end goals of enjoying the company of hundreds of CI-related professionals and offering their experience in workshops, sessions, and meetings again.

THE GLOBAL CI COMMUNITY MEETS AGAIN

While this profession proves time and again that it is not only exciting to engage in and build upon, the global CI community offers value way beyond individual growth potential and networking opportunities. It includes developing true friendship and shared engagement in the cause of progress. Individuals and professionals don't know any boundaries here and this spirit was – once again – felt every minute in the meeting rooms and the hotel hallways at the summit venue.

While the hotel (Hisperia Tower) was situated a bit off course from the stunningly attractive inner city attractions of Barcelona, the hotel itself made up for the taxi rides at





FOCUS ON NETWORKING AND BUILDING FRIENDSHIPS

With an increased focus on interactivity, this year's summit has to be judged as one of the most active, energetic, and result oriented events in the history of SCIP! Many participants took away a tremendous number of new contacts, fresh ideas, and immediately applicable learnings. While the keynotes could become a bit more actionable and strategic in summits to come, member and participant feedback suggested that accessible c-level executives should be lured in to the format more to gain insights into the voice of the customer (decision-makers) for the CI practitioner's services.

Not to single out any of the sessions or workshops in this review, but it's worth mentioning that the most cheered upon speakers rose to the challenge of providing increased interactivity in their sessions. They generated scores of creative ideas, ranging from throwing candy into the crowd for active responses to mutually created work documents as key take-aways.

AN END AND A BEGINNING

As with any of the past SCIP summits, sadness kicks in when bidding each other farewell, thanking all contributors and supporters for the massive value they provided, and for all the friends who disperse into the wide world. While Michel and Jens have yet to share their first calorie-laden doughnut together, the ongoing joy, fun, and shared experiences – beginning with bear salami and temporarily ending with the last Spanish tapas in some idle, yummy Barcelona downtown bar – their minds are already focused on next year's adventure: a train ride across Europe to catch that chocolaty Sacher Torte in Vienna (Google it and you will gain weight and appetite already), adding on more friends and value for our jobs. Once again they bridge industries and geographies because the chemistry is just perfect as enabled by those excellent SCIP summits.

(Michel Bernaiche and Jens Thieme have become competitive intelligence adventurers and visionaries over time and serve the global CI community on the SCIP board. Don't hesitate to take advantage of their energy and expertise and who knows? Some more friendships and personal successes might just be around the corner...)

night. First class rooms, top notch break-out facilities, and excellent food for main courses (and snacks) soothed the senses all along.

As the lodging and conferencing areas were separated into two main buildings, the setup provided excellent access to the exhibit halls and to major gathering places. Breakfast and afternoon snacks were offered right between the vendor community's booths and meeting areas. This provided an outstanding opportunity for practitioners and vendors to meet together outside of sessions. This energy and friendly atmosphere was echoed in the many break-out sessions.