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Review of the 12th 'OzWIT Celebration'

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Reviewed by

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OzWIT 2012 (The 12th Australian Women in Information Technology) had its inaugural New Zealand two day conference in October in Christchurch, New Zealand. OzWIT is an organization (or forum) concerned with the recruitment, retention and advancement of women in computing. Held for the first time outside of Australia, the conference had the objective of celebrating Australian and New Zealand Women in ICT. The first of the OzWIT conferences was held in the University of

Tasmania, Launceston in February 1992. Since then, ten more conferences were held all around Australia. This 12th conference was special, because it was the first conference held outside Australia and the first that included New Zealand women working in IT.

The conferences focus on recruitment and retention of women in ICT in both academia and industry. The aims of the conferences are to broaden the participation of women in information technology, to share programmes, to discuss strategies and to assess progress towards increased diversity of the IT profession.

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As leading gender and IT researcher, Alison Hunter (2012) notes, the latest figures from the 2006 New Zealand censusⁱ show that women are over represented in the clerical category of data entry operators, (82%), yet none were employed as Chief Information Officers in New Zealand companies. This disparity is reflected throughout the IT occupational categories. It is most prominent in the occupations of software engineers and programmers (11%), with the general range being 20-30% across the other categories. The least disparity shows in the occupations of Technical Writers (58%), Database Administrators and Business Analysts (60%), IT Trainers (57%), and Graphic Designers (40%). However, the risk is that New Zealand women in IT are "ghettoized" into these groupings which generally reflect women in support roles, and dealing with training, information management and documentation. The figures do not show women entrepreneurs who have their own companies. The conference gave an opportunity for these women to be more visible and gave them a voice.

This conference brought together around 40 delegates from New Zealand and Australia. The international keynote speaker Professor Dame Wendy Hallⁱⁱ addressed us by video conference. In her warm and passionate speech, she took us through her personal journey from the start of her career to the present day as a prominent IT woman in leadership. Dame Wendy talked about how she had dealt with the rejection of one of her early papers, which reassured those of us who have had similar experiences and encouraged us to persevere with our goals despite setbacks. In her speech, she described her dedication and the passion that she has for the IT profession. She sustained this passion throughout her career and it was a motivation to carry on and look forward in her life. This session was shared with delegates attending the CITRENZ (Computing and Information Technology Research and Education New Zealand) conference.

The CITRENZ conference is an annual international conference that serves as a forum for the discussion and exchange of information on research, teaching and practice on all topics related to Computing and Information Technology research, education and practice.

The NZ OzWIT conference was then opened with an address by Nicky Wagner MP. In her speech, she addressed the role of women professionals in IT and their importance in our society. She acknowledged that women are not equally represented in leadership positions in New Zealand and especially at executive levels. This is even worse for women at executive levels in IT. She welcomed the initiative of the NZ-OzWIT conference. The conference continued with presentations of papers from Beekhuyzen, Craig and Coldwell-Nelson addressing understanding of ICT interventions for girls and McLeod, Frogasz and Lang addressing IT stereotypes in TV shows. The session about individual journeys of leading women in IT was very personal, emotional and sometimes entertaining. Apart from Trish McKinnon from Telecom, Tanja Mitrovic from the University of Canterbury and Hazel Jennings from Dale Jennings Assoc., many other participants shared their stories of working in IT. Associate Prof Alison Clear shared her own journey and we all learned how important it is to appreciate the influence of shopping on our life and its decisions. As a young woman she had the opportunity to sit the entry test for a programming course. Alison's motivation was to spend the rest of the day with her mother in shopping. However, she qualified and this led into a very successful career as a passionate computing educator and leader in IT.

The afternoon finished with a poster presentation by women IT students.

The second day began with two paper presentations (Stockdale and Lang, and Hunter) and a keynote address from Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology (CPIT) CEO Kay Giles. Stockdale and Lang presented work on Women in IT: Building a sustainable group in a technical university, Hunter presented her work on New Zealand women in Computing.

Kay's passionate speech described her voyage in leadership and, in particular, her experience of the devastating earthquakes that hit Christchurch, CPIT, and its students and staff. This made a very deep impression on all of us. Kay's encouraging style, and her very family and people oriented management style, stood out and was very well received.

Our conference continued with a "Being a woman of influence" panel featuring four prominent women from the IT industry; Jo Healey, Melanie Tobeck, Managing Director Jo Miller, and Sue Wilkinson, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a digital marketing organisation.

The afternoon concluded with a workshop led by Jo Miller "Are you the best kept secret in your organization: Build Your Brand" which was immensely enjoyed by all involved. The seminar discussed what it really takes to break through into leadership for women. Jo explained the set of steps that are necessary for women to follow in order to succeed in the leadership of the organization. This celebration of women in the IT profession concluded with lots of fun and friendly discussions around the dinner table, and with the promise that we will all do our best to promote this creative, fun, and so enriching profession to all.



Organisers Alison Clear, Catherine Lang, and Annemieke Craig with conference delegates

This conference has united women IT professionals, from Australia and New Zealand in pursuing the common objective of helping recruit more young women in IT. The OzWIT forum is an important platform to share our experiences and learn from each other. We also plan to implement a programme for high school girls, in order to attract them to the IT professions. This programme has been successfully implemented in Australia and the resources are available for implementation from <http://www.ozwit.org/>.

REFERENCES

Hunter, A. (2012). Locating Women in the New Zealand Computing Industry. *Journal of Applied Computing and Information Technology*, 16(1). Retrieved December 5, 2012 from http://citrenz.ac.nz/jacit/JACIT1601/2012Hunter_ComputingWomen.html

ENDNOTES

ⁱ The 2010-2011 Christchurch Earthquakes postponed the census so these are the latest figures available.

ⁱⁱ Dame Wendy Hall DBE FRS FREng, Dean, Faculty of Physical and Applied Sciences from the University of Southampton