

HP at an Educational Conference

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At HP's invitation I took part in the 10th International Congress on Mathematical Education, ICME 10, in Copenhagen this July. HP had decided rather late that they would pay for a stand at this conference, but once they had decided, they put a lot of effort into it. What was the result?

The Congress is held once every 4 years and is attended by educators from all over the world. This time it was held in a technical university on the outskirts of Copenhagen, in Denmark. The lectures were held in a large building on the campus. Casio had a big stand in a smaller hall connected to the main building. TI had a big stand too, in a separate building. HP opted for a smaller stand opposite the Casio stand, on the other side of the hall.

Casio's stand was huge – they showed all their calculators, but concentrated on their new Classpad 200. They had stacks of documents for users, including solution books in several languages. They had several workshops to demonstrate the Classpad every day, even one in Spanish and one in Japanese though the main language of the congress was English. Casio were a major supporter of the congress, and had posters and leaflets all over the place.

TI's stand was equally impressive if less accessible. There were some TI posters around, and the stand concentrated on providing literature praising the use of advanced calculators for teaching computer algebra. The building TI were in was used for lectures with smaller audiences and for poster presentations of topics not dealt with in lectures, so plenty of people did come here and saw the TI stand.

HP's stand opposite the Casio one was impressive but did not show in any way that it was at a congress for educators. It looked as if it had been designed for a CES (Consumer Electronics Show) or something similar. There was a nice row of displays with all of HP's calculators, and brochures on the calculators below them. There was a Power Point (I think) show of HP calculator emulators for teachers to use in classrooms. And that was it. The HP staff were helpful, but not set up to deal specifically with teachers. The background photographs showing young people were the only indication that the stand might be related to education.

HP had put a lot of effort into getting me to come and present a workshop on how calculators should be used in education, and how they should not be used. What they had not done was tell anyone about the workshop. There was nothing on their stand mentioning the workshop. HP's staff and I were registered as commercial attendees of the conference, not as full attendees, so none of us could go to any of the main presentations, and my workshop was listed in an appendix to the conference program, not in the main body. There were no posters to tell people about the HP stand nor about my presentation. The few people who came to my talk said they were impressed – but I don't expect the talk helped sell a single HP calculator – there just were not enough people there to build up a discussion or to help advertise the products.

The new HP team does have members who know about education and about education conferences, but the marketing people who set up the stand for the congress did not show awareness of what was needed. They most certainly had not talked to any of the people who had previously worked at HP to sell calculators to students through teachers. It is very good that HP were there; unfortunately the HP calculator team seems to have missed an opportunity. I just hope they will learn

from this for future educational shows and conferences. As for me, I enjoyed being there and had a chance to wander around Copenhagen – a wonderful city.