

A REAL PEST CONTROL CONFERENCE

December 1, 2020



*Queensland has played host to a small in-person conference in the form of the Essential Pest Management event organised by pest manager **Marshall Blacklock**.*

In this year of cancelled conferences, pest managers have been missing out on face-to-face interaction and educational events, with Zoom meetings, webinars and virtual conferences not quite filling the void. **Marshall Blacklock** from **CDI Pest Management** in Toowoomba agreed, so when lockdown measures were eased in Queensland during winter, he decided it was time to ditch the web and organise a real pest control conference, with real people! And pest managers jumped at the chance, with 21 of them keen to rub shoulders – in a COVID-safe, socially distanced way of course – and attend the Essential Pest Management conference held in Toowoomba in October.

With interstate restrictions still in place, the two-day conference was only open to Queensland pest managers, but they came from far and wide, including south and central Queensland, the Gold Coast and as far north as Mackay and Roma out west.



The conference was attended by 21 pest managers from across Queensland.

Much like a similar conference Mr Blacklock helped organise in Townsville two years ago, the purpose of this conference was to provide a learning experience for technicians, office staff and owners. However, Mr Blacklock also wanted to use the conference to provide more than just product marketing presentations.

“A lot of the national conferences are focused on business owners and products, and less on basic knowledge. What we wanted to do was to provide real learning opportunities for office staff and technicians, as well as owners, and provide facts and knowledge rather than product marketing material. For example, we wanted to teach people about rodents and rodent control, rather than just giving presentations about the ‘best’ rodent product.”

The program was varied, covering pest identification and behaviour, termite treatments, product chemistry, job management software, marketing, report writing and client management. All the speakers were present in person, with the exception of **David Priddy** from Sundew Solutions who was still in lockdown in Melbourne but was able to deliver his presentation by video.

Keynote speaker, **Tracey Danny** from Hot Wired Auto Electrical, was able to attend face-to-face, and provided attendees with interesting strategies on handling crisis situations, with her message being that it's best to accept the brutal reality of the situation, work on solutions and move on. She also explained that while having a positive outlook is great, there's evidence to indicate that pessimists often deal with a crisis more effectively than optimists, being quicker to accept the new reality and plot a way forward, rather than ignore it with a "she'll be 'right'" attitude.

In keeping with the objectives of the conference, sponsors provided educational sessions on a variety of topics, rather than more marketing style presentations promoting products. Mini workshops and discussion groups broke up the presentation sessions. "When talking and discussing with your peers you learn a lot, so we always try to include workshops and discussions during the conference and these tend to work better with smaller groups, which are less intimidating.

These bring a lot of value to the participants," explained Mr Blacklock. One of the workshops focused on 'Values and Culture'. While businesses accept these are important elements for a successful business, the majority of attendees admitted to not actually having a written list of company values. "It was agreed that living your company values was important to develop the desired culture within the company, which in turn can help with the external company image," said Mr Blacklock. "At CDI Pest Management, we feel it's important to review and refresh these values as a team every couple of years, to make sure the team and business is on track. That way we can embed the values in the business."

The conference also included a customer visit to a commercial site – Homestyle Bake, a large commercial bakery – with attendees able to walk through the site. "The visit was aimed at illustrating to pest managers what it takes to support a large-scale commercial client and one that has a complex HACCP pest management program in place. The idea was to show the attendees, especially those not involved in commercial pest control, what it takes to deliver a pest control management program at that level," said Mr Blacklock.

Of course social events are one of the more enjoyable add-ons to any conference, and with social restrictions eased, the attendees participated with vigour, with casual beers on the first night and a more formal dinner on the second night to close the conference. "We certainly did plenty of socialising!" said Mr Blacklock. As with any conference, sponsor support is vital and Mr Blacklock would like to thank the key sponsors Syngenta and Bell, as well as Sundew, BASF and Termseal.

And thanks to its success, Mr Blacklock said he'd consider running a similar event in the future. "It's not about trying to make a buck out of running conferences, it's more about giving back to the industry and helping our peers learn, while bringing people together."