



Oh, no, we won't

oh, yes, we will!



ILLUSTRATION BY: STEVE CHADBURN

Do you think it's getting too big?

Well, yes – it's the world's biggest event for educational ICT. And yes, it's a 'must' event for anyone involved in the field. So why, every year, do I find myself compiling a list of reasons *not* to go to BETT?

It usually goes something like this:

1. It's in January. *January*, for heaven's sake! Notwithstanding the fact that I'm a firm believer that human beings have a fundamental design flaw in that we don't hibernate in the winter, it's always flippin' *freezing* in London in January. Only a couple of years ago I stepped off the Tube at Olympia into a howling blizzard. I looked like Scott of the Antarctic's colder brother by the time I actually got into the hall itself. Is it only me who thinks holding BETT in January is insane??
2. It's in London. OK, maybe as someone who lives north of Watford, it always peeves me that everything of any importance seems to happen in the south-east corner of our country instead of in the middle, where it would be easier for the majority of us to reach. But it's compounded by the fact that Olympia is about as close to being the back of beyond as it's possible in London. Only a complete masochist would drive

there, which leaves most of us at the mercy of the Tube. And of course, Olympia being at the end of a little branch line, the Tube service only seems to run every half hour from Earls Court – or when they can actually be bothered. Which leads us to...

3. The London Underground. Except it isn't, is it? Both Earls Court and Olympia are above ground, which means, in January, freezing to death on Earls Court station waiting for the shuttle to Olympia to condescend to turn up. Or, at the other end, playing sardines in a ridiculously overcrowded train which always seems to hang around for at least half an hour with the doors open, regardless of whether it's possible to cram any more bag-laden suckers onto it or not! Is there a worse public transport system anywhere? Is this Ken Livingstone's revenge on the rest of the country?
4. You need to have muscles like King Kong to cope with the sheer volume of leaflets, magazines and other bits of paper you accumulate during the average BETT day. Not to mention having to carry around your packed lunch because otherwise you spend so much time queuing for food that you miss half the

show. I did consider taking a wheelbarrow with me one year, but they wouldn't let me on the Tube with it – well, not unless I paid double fare!

5. Er... the standard of freebie pens has really gone down over the last few years. OK, maybe I'm grasping at straws here, but admit it! We all use BETT to stock up on pens for the next year, don't we? So come on, exhibitors! We really need a better standard of freebie pen at a major event like this. And not flashy gimmicks either. One stand a couple of years ago were giving away pens that lit up like a *Star Wars* light sabre, but they ran dry after just a few weeks. On the other hand, I'm still using my 2001 Crick pen...
6. It's too BIG! It is absolutely impossible to get around BETT in a single day unless you were born on the planet Krypton and/or are capable of holding simultaneous conversations with six different people in different parts of the hall, while at the same time attending three different seminars!

But for all that, I'll be at BETT this year, half-frozen, loaded down with bags full of paper and every pocket full of dodgy pens. Why? Because, no matter how many reasons I think of for not going, when I get there it's all instantly forgotten. I get so absorbed in it all that nothing else matters; I enjoy the experience so much that the next Ice Age could start, the world's fuel reserves could run out and I'd still find a way to get there. It would be unthinkable *not* to go!

Now, if only we could persuade them to start a new BETT Awards category for the best freebie pen...

■ Zarquon Singingfish