

CASE STUDY

“Goning” for Gold in Seattle: The PRC Conference Committee’s Vision and the Intelligent Innovation that Brought it to Life

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When the SMPS Pacific Regional Conference (PRC) lands in Seattle March 18-20, 2026, attendees will walk into an event organized by over 70 volunteers and more than two years in the making. As one of the largest SMPS regional conferences, the PRC is an incredible opportunity to connect, learn, and see the sights in a new city, or see your hometown through a new lens—all aligned with our vision to bring people together, elevate our profession, and create experiences that resonate long after the closing session.

Forming the Team

As any marketer knows, an event of this scale involves an incredible amount of planning and coordination. From the outset, we knew the traditional two-chair model wouldn’t work for us, so we formed a trio. We’d worked well together in the past on the SMPS Seattle Board of Directors, and we bring a diverse set of skills.

Turns out, a lot of life can happen over the course of a few years. Aging parents, young children, illnesses, a wedding, countless work deadlines, and many other life events have impacted us during planning. Having a trio to juggle the many planning and coordination efforts for the conference has been essential. Through every twist and turn, our shared vision kept us centered. It also guided how we embraced new tools, including AI, to imagine and execute a conference experience worthy of that ambition. .

Warming Up

Our first task was to select a venue and dates, and believe it or not, the size of the venue limited our choices right out of the gate. Fairly quickly, we landed on the Hyatt Regency, and after a few volleys back and forth, locked in the relatively new hotel for our conference.

Next up was selecting a conference theme and brand identity. Our type-A brains were quickly overwhelmed by the daunting task of choosing a theme that would be inspiring and bold, yet playful enough to capture the laid-back vibes of the Pacific Northwest. We tossed around a few ideas: Music, Art, Sports....ah, sports! The great equalizer.

A few Google searches and clicks later, we confirmed our sports theme choice; Seattle would be a host city for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, 2026 is a Winter Olympics and Paralympics year, and who doesn’t love to root for, or against, the Seahawks, Mariners, or Sounders? But now what?

Enter ChatGPT, our generative artificial intelligence (AI) tool of choice at the time—not as a shortcut, but as a creative partner. We wanted a theme that reflected the pursuit of excellence in AEC marketing and the mindset of elite athletes. AI helped give our vision momentum.

“Please create a list of name ideas for a conference in Seattle in 2026 that is based on sports and the competitive nature of marketing and business development in the architecture, engineering,

and construction fields. It should embrace ambition, growth, and the craft of marketing in an era of rapid transformation. Something like ‘Going for Gold.’”

Then came the suggestions:

“Emerald City Edge: AEC Marketers Conference,

Blueprint for Victory: Marketing & Business Development Excellence,

Peak Performance: Seattle AEC Marketing Games, and our personal favorite:

Marketing Gladiators: Enter the Proposal Thunderdome”

YIKES. We unanimously agreed that we all still liked our prompt, ‘Going for Gold,’ the best. But parts of the subtitle suggestions could work. We landed on ‘Going for Gold: Achieving Excellence in A/E/C.’ Now, to give the theme a personality.

“Let’s generate some ideas with Adobe Firefly,” Erin suggested. So down the rabbit hole we went. Just like Alice entering Wonderland, we encountered some truly bizarre hallucinations on our journey. Disorienting skylines, twisted adaptations of Olympic rings, and odd typos. ‘GONING FOR SEATALLÉ’ read one image. We all laughed a bit too hard; this AI journey was making us loopy



Caption for graphic: *We’re not really naming our conference Goning for Gold, but we thought readers would appreciate this AI-generated blooper we experienced while prompting ChatGPT to brainstorm ideas for us.*

Something about the image stuck however, and we knew we had enough to at least get us started. We decided to enlist the help of a human designer to take our AI concepts to the next level.

Running Drills

Thanks to an in-kind sponsorship, Tanner at Design Hippo developed comprehensive brand assets and guidelines that gave us a strong foundation. With the brand direction set—shaped by both human creativity and early AI inspiration—we were ready to scale the vision through our volunteer team.

Once the 2025 PRC conference wrapped, the real work began: recruiting volunteers, appointing Committee Chairs, and launching early tasks like the Call for Speakers and Call for Sponsors. To articulate our theme, we again turned to AI, asking ChatGPT to craft a narrative linking excellence in AEC with the mindset of elite athletes.

The resulting language, refined through human review, became central to our messaging. Committees integrated it into their materials, and soon speaker applications and sponsorships poured in. We received 91 workshop and breakout submissions—a record—with many embracing the sports-inspired theme.

Doing Reps

It takes a crew to review speaker applications - and what a process it was! Thanks to an elaborate system of spreadsheets and rating systems, and a little help from AI to review and summarize feedback from previous years, the final slate of speakers was selected! Submissions were rated against a strict list of criteria by no fewer than three human reviewers each to ensure alignment with the conference theme and our vision to help marketers, business developers, and firm leaders achieve their best personal and professional performance.

A Winning Strategy for Game Day

With our identity solidified, speakers confirmed, and sponsors on board, we shifted our focus to shaping the attendee experience—staying true to PRC’s core blend of inspiration, learning, and community.

We secured three dynamic keynotes:

Tracy Joyner, University of Oregon Women’s Soccer Coach, opening with lessons on resilience, adaptability, and team culture.

Amber Wendover, a leadership coach, offering a leadership reset centered on wellbeing and emotional intelligence.

Danielle Gray, a marketing expert, closing with the power of grounded, calm leadership in a fast-paced industry.

To help attendees connect and feel supported, we expanded experiential elements: a strong First Timer’s Session, a dedicated Chapter Leaders Session, optional Morning Yoga, the Thursday Night Social at SPIN Seattle, and Friday walking tours with the Seattle Architecture Foundation. We also built out a robust conference app, Guidebook, with details and recommendations to ensure attendees have a smooth experience; communicating essential changes proactively; adding in fun extras to encourage conversation and connection.

Together, these offerings create a balanced, memorable, and uniquely Seattle conference experience.

Going for Gold

Planning for the 2026 Pacific Regional Conference may have started with a few humorous generative AI sessions, but its purpose couldn’t be clearer: It’s about the people. Our vision is to bring people together, elevate the profession, and create experiences that stay with attendees long after the closing session.

Our team of 70+ professionals has spent months envisioning, planning, and executing every detail. AI was simply one of the tools that helped us imagine possibilities, accelerate our work, and stay aligned with the ambitious experience we set out to deliver.

We invite you to join us in Seattle, where we'll unite 500+ AEC marketing and business development professionals to learn, connect, chase excellence, and Go for Gold—together.

About the Pacific Regional Conference

The SMPS Pacific Regional Conference (PRC) is one of the largest regional conferences in the country, bringing together an average of 400-500 people each spring from across the West Coast. PRC includes chapters in Alaska, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, Washington, Oregon, and Montana. Volunteers curated a conference that includes 18 breakout sessions, three keynote addresses, and pre-conference workshops, ensuring that programming is both diverse and relevant. Learn more at www.smeps-prc.org.