



ICCA CONVENTION CENTRES IDENTIFY SEVEN TOPICAL TRENDS

EVEN THOUGH INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS TODAY ARE EXPECTING MORE QUALITY FOR LESS MONEY, THE MAJOR MEETING CENTERS ACROSS THE GLOBE ARE RISING TO THE CHALLENGE. IN A SURVEY, A SELECT GROUP OF INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTERS DRAWN FROM THE BROAD MEMBERSHIP BASE OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CONGRESS CENTRES (AIPC) (ED-WHO ARE ALSO MEMBERS OF ICCA) WERE ABLE TO IDENTIFY SEVEN DEADLY TRENDS THAT THEY NOW HAVE TO CONFRONT.

1. RELATIONSHIP SHIFTS

Pressures over the past few years have meant many organizations have downsized, outsourced or restructured their meeting planner function. Some turned to third-party association management companies; others shifted their internal staff around.

Several took on the contracted functions themselves. "More and more associations are willing to allocate permanent in-house resources", says Cliff Wallace, managing director of the Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre. "A PCO may be deployed but often at a later stage and for specific parts of the pre-event planning or on-site cooperation."

This has meant significant effects on traditional relationships, on marketing, client liaison and even how bidding for a particular event is carried out.

2. SKILLS HIKE

Planning is becoming increasingly professional.

"There have been significant increases in the event management skills and expertise of association executives", says Geoff Donaghy, managing director of the Cairns Convention Centre. "International headquarters are not always content to leave all aspects of their meetings to the respective host national committees".

"In the past, many association planners were volunteers," points out Isabel Bardinet, executive director of sales and development at the Palais des Congrès de Paris. "This has completely changed, and now most are full time professionals who know what they want, how they want it and how much they are prepared to pay for it."

3. BUYERS' MARKET

With a growing number of facilities contending for limited business, competition has become more intense. This has meant a greater use of incentives in some areas and higher expectations for facility operational standards. At the same time, there has been a shortening of decision periods, with many clients wanting to avoid contracting as long as possible.

"The competition between many regional and national convention centers in Europe has led to centers being sold under the real price and many receiving subsidies from the local or regional government," says Edgar Hirt, head of ICM - Internationales Congress Center München. "This is now happening within the new EU-countries as well."

For associations, there's a positive side to this. Geoff Donaghy: "Of course the opportunity for associations to be more discerning and to drive for better city and centre deals has been greatly enhanced by the rapid increase in new destinations and venues chasing their important business".

4. SECURITY CONCERNS

Many clients have elevated security issues to one of their top priorities.

Legal and regulatory issues have arisen from the new concern about global security. "In light of recent and significant world events, association conference organizers scrutinize force majeure and cancellation clauses in their contracts even more than before," says Cliff Wallace. "At the same time, some destinations have imposed stricter visa requirements in recent years which created even more challenges for organizers."

5. CHANGING NEEDS

An increasing emphasis on the "business" aspect of an event has changed space requirements. Clients now have different demands, ranging from the need for larger numbers of breakout rooms to increased hopes of "value-added" benefits.

Technology expectations are an issue in themselves. "Audiovisual requirements are getting more sophisticated all the time, as multi-media equipment becomes more advanced and more affordable," says Cliff Wallace.

6. QUALITY STANDARDS DEMANDS

With an ever-increasing array of facilities to choose from, congress centre clients are becoming very demanding about the level of facilities and services they are prepared to accept.

This is seen as a very positive development by most centers. "If we as suppliers can offer "a state of the art" facility, with superb infrastructure, accessibility, hotels and well trained and friendly staff, we can look very optimistically to the future," says Edgar Hirt.

7. DELEGATE EXPERIENCE:

Delegates are increasingly demanding value from the events they attend, not just educational content but a positive social and destination experience. At the same time, many associations are more dependent than ever on a good delegate turnout to generate revenue for the organization.

This has opened up opportunities for lesser-known facilities that can offer a unique kind of experience. Many planners seem increasingly interested in looking at smaller and newer centers.

Change is the new reality and must be addressed as an ongoing part of business, say the centers. Geoff Donaghy: “We live in an environment of rapid change and global evolution and neither convention centers nor the meetings industry itself is immune from this”.

ICCA, the International Congress and Convention Association, started in the early 1960s as a group of travel agents who had started getting business from the then new phenomenon of international association meetings. Today ICCA has over 770 member companies and organizations in almost 80 countries worldwide, covering all the supplier segments to the international meetings market: airlines, DMC's and PCO's, meeting hotels and convention centres, convention bureaux and tourist offices, as well as a host of specialist publishers, technology companies, researchers and consultants. ICCA's core interest remains the same as at its birth: the international association meetings market. Through our e-newsletter “ICCA Intelligence” ICCA provides expertise and advice for associations looking to find ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their meetings. Visit WWW.ICCAWORLD.COM for more information.