

# VENUE AND SITE SELECTION - A NEW APPROACH?

MANY WORDS HAVE BEEN WRITTEN ALREADY ABOUT THE PROCESS OF SELECTING BEST POSSIBLE SITE AND VENUE FOR YOUR MEETING, AS WELL AS THE NUMEROUS DETAILS TO PAY ATTENTION TO. IT IS OFTEN OVERLOOKED TO **PROPERLY SET THE GOALS AND DESIRED OUTCOMES OF THE MEETING** BEFORE STARTING ANY PLANNING ACTIVITIES. IS THE MEETING ORGANISED TO ATTRACT A LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE, RAISE AWARENESS, ENGAGE CUSTOMERS OR GROW MEMBERSHIP IN A PARTICULAR AREA? OR ARE EDUCATION, SCIENTIFIC EXCHANGE AND NETWORKING THE KEY FACTORS THAT MEASURE THE SUCCESS OF THE MEETING? ALL OF THESE GOALS SET THE MEASUREMENT FACTORS AND THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT FOR A MEETING AND SHOULD BE THE FIRST STEPS IN THE PLANNING OF ANY MEETING.

TEXT **MICHAEL PODT** - CONFERENCE MANAGER, MCI BRUSSELS

All meeting planners are aware that appropriate hotel accommodation, availability of public transport and distance from major international airports are key, but in today's society, these infrastructures are in place almost anywhere and are common and relatively easy to evaluate.

Conference participants nowadays expect more from their meeting, and there is an increased pressure on organisers to provide high-quality education and to facilitate networking, even outside of the meeting room and exhibition areas. Large international congresses are evolving into smaller, more focused conferences, which sometimes take place in a specific region only. This requires a shift in the approach to site selection. Rather than focusing on bids from major capitals that ensure a high-quality infrastructure, a conference could potentially benefit from a **smaller setting** in a second tier city, where participants may find each other in the street and in local restaurants and bars during the evening, optimising networking opportunities.

For conferences of up to 800 delegates, a larger hotel venue that can accommodate most of the participants and meeting space is often preferable to a conference centre used for meeting with participants based in several hotels throughout

the city. For smaller meetings of up to 150 participants, many wonderful, more isolated, venues exist where an organiser can have exclusive use of an entire property. This demands a little more flexibility from the participant (longer travel times, fewer activities outside of the conference), and flexibility on the part of the organiser (facilitation of transportation, and evening functions). However, networking without any distraction, and the potential of an undisturbed focus on education can be a great **added value for the meeting**, offering an extremely effective vehicle to **deliver your message**. Another plus is that the value for money outside of the major hubs increases greatly in many cases.

Other important factors that should be considered before determining the location of your conference can be the **geographic spread of your participants**. If you are after maximizing your attendance, select an area where your customers and members are located and if you want to provide easy access for your speakers and executives, a major hub should be considered. On the other hand, you may wish to attract a new audience and focus on attracting new members by organising your meeting in countries or cities where these are proving a challenge and can therefore be a boost for your activities.



MICHAEL PODT

Determining your **desired attendance** in terms of numbers must be evaluated before selecting your site. Planning for the ideal size of your meeting, based on the set goals and budget, should determine also the venue. Frequently, conference venues are selected with meeting-, and exhibition space that can accommodate an audience comfortably, resulting in a session room that is only filled up to half of its size by participants and an exhibition area that looks empty even during breaks, even if the targets are met. Having a meeting room that is full at all times **facilitates discussion**, and an exhibition area that is buzzing with activity is perceived much better by all stakeholders. Do not plan too big!

Setting realistic goals with key stakeholders involved (members, speakers, corporate partners) before planning your meeting give a more appropriate foundation for a planner to conduct its site and venue selection, and allows him to propose the best meeting solutions. It also allows for adjustments of planning efforts during, and a thorough evaluation after the meeting to set the goals for the future.

[www.mci-group.com](http://www.mci-group.com)