

## AIPC gearing up

AUSTRIA - This year's AIPC (International Association of Congress Centres) annual conference in Graz Austria, 15-18 July, has lined up a strong education agenda and keynote speakers from within and outside the meetings industry.

Highlights were expected to be AIPC's new Quality Standards Programme, news of the AIPC Academy and results of the first AIPC *State of the Industry* survey.

The overall conference theme is 'Responding to Global Change', and members are set to explore how destinations get their image (and how this can be managed), and to get insights on

how key sectors like the hotel industry are evolving, as well as learning about the needs and expectations of event organisers.

UK-based author of *Competitive identity: the new brand management for nations, cities and regions*, and publisher of major surveys on destination branding, Simon Anholt, was to deliver the keynote presentation.

Anholt originated the concept of nation branding in 1996 and will explain how centres can meet the challenge of achieving a destination image that appeals to business leaders, event organisers and delegates, rather than just leisure visitors.

## Vector float sinks

UK - The £2 billion London Stock Exchange flotation of Vector Hospitality was pulled in June "due to market conditions" according to Vector. The investment trust was aiming to be the largest UK property flotation this year and to buy assets including Malmaison, Hotel du Vin, as well as De Vere and Village hotels and conference properties.

The price was cut back by £460 million a day prior to launch as the market softened, but to no avail. Institutional investors had reportedly expressed concern over a perceived conflict of interests surrounding the ownership and management of assets involving Vector directors.

Vector, set up on 23 March 2007 by Richard Balfour-Lynn's Alternative Hotel Group, Bank of Scotland and Royal Bank of Scotland, was planning to use the funds to buy £2.6 billion of hotel assets and then float as the first listed hotel group structured as a real estate investment trust.

The decision to cancel the float meant a postponement of the separate sale of the Malmaison and Hotel du Vin hotel chains to Vector. The chain's parent, Marylebone Warwick Balfour, of which Balfour-Lynn is chief executive, had agreed to sell its nine Malmaisons and eight Hotel du Vins to Vector for £495 million, conditional on Vector's IPO going ahead.

## HSMAI sees more meetings

USA - According to a survey of pre-registered attendees at the Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International's Affordable Meetings West show, June 19-20, at the San Jose McEnery Convention Center, 61.7 per cent were planning more meetings or events in 2007 than in 2006. Of those, 77.4 per cent said they would be planning on average 10 more events in 2007. The data indicated planners

have more meetings, increased responsibility, larger events, and are faced with increasing technological expectations.

Over 700 industry professionals attended the 20 workshops and seminars and the main show itself.

HSMAI's final show in the 2007 programme is Affordable Meetings® National, which is slated for 5-6, September 2007 at the Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C.

## RFH tees off in Morocco, with Moscow to follow

WORLD - Rocco Forte Hotels, which is celebrating its tenth anniversary, has signed a contract to operate the new £170 million Assoufid golf resort in Marrakech and is close to clinching a city centre project in Moscow.

RFH is also believed to be seeking more properties in Europe and an entry into New York. Sir Rocco Forte, pictured below, said he was getting more approaches "now we're seen as a serious operator".

The Morocco deal follows a similar project in Sicily and underlines RFH's move into resorts.

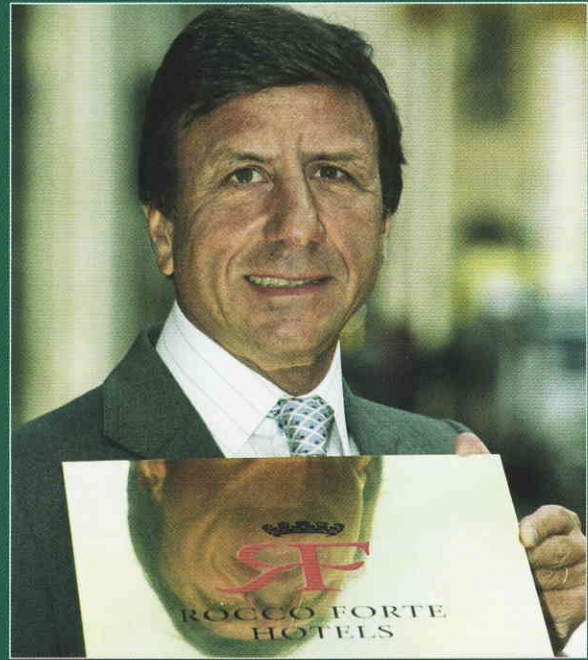
In the year to the end of April,

RFH achieved earnings of £27 million from a turnover of £120 million.

Meanwhile, RFH has taken the Lowry Hotel in Manchester off the market, having failed to secure an acceptable offer.

And to celebrate the opening, 21 September, of the RFH Le Richmond hotel in Geneva, a 25 per cent discount on daily delegate rates is on offer for meetings booked before 31 August and that take place October-December.

Le Richmond is undergoing an 18-month renovation and offers over 476 metres of conference and banqueting facilities in the centre of the city.



## MCI and Ovation merger

IRELAND - Ovation Group, a leading meetings and destination management company in Ireland, with a turnover of £10 million, has merged its business with global association, communications and event management company MCI. Ovation's events and conference business in

Ireland will be rebranded as MCI Belfast and MCI Dublin, while MCI's destination management business worldwide will become Ovation International. Ovation co-founders Patrick Delaney and Padraic Gilligan retain full responsibility for the merged entity's operations in Ireland.