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Academy graduates will have been given a high level overview of the industry which allows them to put their particular job in context. At the same time, they will have participated in an extensive exchange of current issues facing centres around the world, which helps create the kind of networks and international perspective that is so important to potential senior managers.

Over the past year, AIPC worked hard to design a program that dealt exclusively with the unique issues, opportunities and operational requirements of congress centre management - something that has never before been available on a global basis. Faculty members from around the world including Germany, France, Singapore, Canada, the US and the UK delivered courses ranging from building operations and financial management to human resources, event management, sales and marketing, community relations, and security. In all cases, these topics were delivered in a congress centre context using relevant examples from actual centre operations.

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*AIPC Academy Faculty. From left: John Christison (Washington State Convention & Trade Center), Warren Buckley (Suntec Singapore), Edgar Hirt (ICM München), Rod Cameron (AIPC), Barbara Maple (Vancouver Convention & Exhibition Centre), Marcia Lyons (Calgary TELUS Convention Centre)*

It's pretty obvious why this program is of use to congress centre managers. But why should other clients and industry colleagues care? There are at least two very good reasons.

First, from a client point of view, the AIPC Academy is a guarantee that the high-quality products expected from suppliers these days will continue, at least with respect to congress centres. This kind of training not only helps deliver better service, but allows individual centres to develop a better "world view", which helps them put client needs and issues into a broader perspective and draw on the experiences of many other facilities in looking for solutions.

Second, it raises the overall standard of expertise available in the industry,

and encourages everyone to set their sights higher. Today's conferences and congresses are complex affairs - and require as much knowledge and technical understanding as possible. We believe the Academy will make a significant contribution to the overall knowledge pool - and in so doing, help everyone do a better job in the common mission we have to provide a great event experience.

In a time when there's not much hope of avoiding looming labour shortages, programmes like the AIPC Academy can help ease the pain - and ensure both centres and their clients have reason to believe that high quality service will be as much a part of the future of congress centres as it has been in the past. *Events*

The whole idea is to provide broad, industry-focused information to help convention centre staff improve performance in their current positions, and prepare them for more responsibilities within their respective facilities.