

Local challenges; global solutions



By Edgar Hirt

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As an industry that deals to a large degree with international clients and events that rotate through many parts of the world, we spend a lot of time looking at international trends and the implications of issues such as the globalisation of business activities.

While this is useful in creating a broader context for our activities as congress centres, the reality is that most of us are heavily occupied with events and conditions much closer to home. The question becomes how can we benefit in our local situations from the experiences and expertise of those in other parts of the world?

To begin, we need to recognise two realities. First, we do operate in a global industry simply because the expectations of clients are becoming universal. As mentioned, many clients rotate their events through many different countries and facilities, and so they have come to have a wide basis for comparison. This, in turn, leads to them reaching their own conclusions

about what is possible, practical and economical, and that shapes what they expect to get when they come to any facility in the world.

At the same time, it is clear that we as congress centres all work in a local environment shaped by conditions in our own countries and cities; a very large proportion of our business is regional and we are heavily impacted by everything from regional economics to local politics.

How can we and our customers then benefit from our understanding of global issues? I believe there are two important ways:

First, we can learn by example. In the world of congress centres, there are variations of practically every imaginable form of facilities, operations, economics, governance, funding and marketing, and all these have something to teach us. From such a wide array of choices, it is possible to select those models that most closely approximate the conditions we

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ourselves are working under and that therefore respond best to our local challenges. In this way, more efficient local models develop and everyone from the owners of the centre to the customers who use our facilities benefit.

Second, the ability to refer to global issues and examples often helps guide local decision-making. Most owners and governments – who in our industry are often the same people – take comfort from knowing that the direction they are intending to take is consistent with what others are doing elsewhere. At the same time, they can be encouraged to take action to avoid situations where experience in other countries has shown there are potential problems. As an example, we have all seen the results of overbuilding capacity – where too much space ultimately leads to lowered government investment and reduced quality of services and facilities for clients.

The better the quality of decision-making, the more likely it is that these kinds of problems can be avoided – and decision-making benefits from having the best possible information available as to the consequences of various courses of action. *Events*