

# The PCO, the conference centre, and the client relationship

The IAPCO/AIPC joint seminar at IMEX 2005 on how centres and PCOs can work together to add value to associations' events attracted more than 80 delegates from PCOs, centres and clients. Rod Cameron chaired the seminar, and the panel comprised two IAPCO members – Roslyn McLeod of Tour Hosts, Australia, and Philippe Fournier of MCI Paris, France – plus two AIPC members – Rochelle Kempton of Cairns Convention Centre, Australia,



The panel: Rod Cameron, Rochelle Kempton, Isabel Bardinet, Roslyn McLeod, Philippe Fournier

and Isabel Bardinet, formerly of the Palais des Congrès de Paris, France.

Isabel Bardinet cautioned against simply repeating past successes in the development of association events. "Beware the 'cut and paste' syndrome," she warned. "The association client of yesterday is not the association client of today, nor will it be the association client of tomorrow." In developing events, she said, three organisations must have an input – the client, the congress centre and the PCO.

## The sales perspective

This point was reiterated by Rochelle Kempton, who said that to ensure maximum efficiency, it is essential for the centre, the client, and the PCO, to recognise each other's roles, to avoid costly duplication of effort. Everyone is in business to make a profit, not least association clients, which are increasingly reliant on the profits from congresses to fund association activities throughout the year. Consequently, the focus for these events must be on achieving the best possible outcome, and so each partner – PCO, client, and centre – needs to concentrate on its own

responsibility and use its own knowledge to the best advantage.

## The in-house PCO

If a strong relationship between PCO and centre is of such importance, why not use a centre's own in-house PCO? "This is not an option," stated Isabel Bardinet. "Ultimately, there will be a conflict of interest; you cannot always serve two masters, and at some stage there will be a choice for the in-house PCO regarding whether to put the client first or the centre."

### The relationship

It is important to recognise that 75% of association clients request a list of PCOs from the congress centre with which they propose to establish a partnership. At this stage, it is possible for the fledgling and potentially fragile relationship between the centre and the client to disintegrate as the client and the PCO work increasingly closely together. This is a problem, from the centre's point of view – it is potentially isolated from the 'organisational picture'.

To obviate this problem, it is essential that the centre is kept abreast of all administrative aspects and timetabling, in order to enable it to provide its full support to the event. It is equally important that the PCO keeps up to date with developments in the facilities at the centre, knowledge of which might be available 'behind the scenes' as well as from front-line contacts. In summary, the relationship between the client, the centre and the PCO must be one of mutual trust, and needs to be built up over time. Each partner should be respectful of the others' knowledge and should acknowledge the boundary in responsibilities between the centre and the PCO, which are combining for the benefit of the client.

### Hardware and software

Roslyn McLeod described the different roles of the PCO and the centre in serving the client as akin to 'hardware' and 'software' being purchased by the client in order to hold a particular meeting, discussing particular topics, for a particular audience. The centre provides the 'hardware' – the purpose-built infrastructure in which to hold the event. The PCO brings the 'software' for planning and running the meeting – the intellectual property and the outsourcing of resources and infrastructure. Philippe Fournier continued this analogy by highlighting that hardware and software cannot work without each other. Acknowledging that centres and PCOs are both specialists in their own fields, and are both key contacts for clients, will ultimately lead to optimum outcomes for clients.

Fournier summed things up, saying, "Let's get to know each other better and the result will be a win-win-win situation – for the PCO, for the congress centre and, most importantly, for the client." Working together to make an event as successful as possible should be the priority, because, as Rochelle Kempton concluded, "Always remember that a happy client will increase business for everyone."



## JMIC announces 2005 Unity Award winner and unveils new website

Laure Mouton of the Palais des Congrès de Paris is the Joint Meetings Industry Council (JMIC) 2005 Unity Award winner. JMIC President Barbara Maple presented her with the award during the recent IMEX exhibition. The annual award was established by the JMIC to recognise individuals who have made significant contributions to the advancement of the meetings industry. It is presented to those who have shown industry leadership and initiative.

The JMIC has also launched its new website, [www.themeetingsindustry.org](http://www.themeetingsindustry.org), at IMEX. The website has been developed to highlight the 'Profile and Power' programme, an initiative aimed at raising the profile of the meetings industry worldwide. The JMIC started work on this

initiative in 2002, its members having recognised that the meetings industry was at a disadvantage compared with other industries owing to a low level of awareness of its purpose, activities and benefits. The initial 'Profile and Power' report recommended a 'bottom-up' strategy, involving the JMIC supporting individual community initiatives and collecting and sharing the successes and experiences of the participants.

The programme aims to improve community and governmental awareness of the importance of the meetings industry and the benefits it produces for local communities, and therefore to improve industry members' ability to lobby and influence decisions that affect their collective future.