

India slowly edging ahead of China

By Warren Buckley, CEO, Stantec Singapore

While much of the world is watching the emerging economic power of China, two things are often overlooked.

Firstly, India is undergoing an equally dramatic economic evolution, and secondly, this growth will have big implications for the meetings and exhibitions sectors.

China and India will doubtless be dominant economic powers by the middle of this century, but in many key aspects they are quite different from one another. This is reflected in the position each has in the areas of conventions and exhibitions, where the scorecard is continually changing. In fact, the strengths of India are often the weaknesses of China, and the strengths of China are the weaknesses of India.

has been slow in India because of the democratic safety valves in place to guide change. While change may take longer in India, it will likely pay off handsomely in the future.

Economic Strategy Institute president Clyde Prestowitz has said that although China is far ahead of India with an economy twice as large and growing faster, it has vulnerabilities over the long term. "The same lack of rule of law and due process that has allowed it rapid development has also led to corruption and social unrest. Although India's democratic system can be cumbersome and slow, it is stable."

More crucial differences can be found in social structure and

telephone hotel registration may be done through a small but high-tech office in Bangalore with your contact speaking with an American or British accent.

English is still not widespread in China, which significantly restricts its potential for international meetings.

There are also major differences in the business environments of the two countries. Selling to the Chinese, particularly in their own market, is still a real challenge. The rules are unique, and in many respects the norms or ethics of western economies go out the window. And to be successful in China, a local partner is necessary. This adds another layer of complexity. But once past

Targeting the VIP

While the old customer service adage is to treat every customer like a VIP, in the exhibition and event industry there often are genuine VIP guests, be they speakers, clients, managers, prominent industry members or parliamentarians.

Because of the competitive nature of exhibitions, business competitors become neighbours on the floor, pushing those who are savvy to run special VIP programs such as product previews. There is power in pampering VIP visitors, especially when it creates a point of difference for the company.

Networking events, "exclusive" offers and invitations, and new or best-selling product giveaways help grow business relationships.

And when it comes to

suppliers, special ingredients (event management/marketing), Expo Hire (exhibition booth set-up), Advantage (AV services), Watterson Marketing Communications (public relations).

Catering: Breakfast (sugar-cured bacon and egg roll with crusty baguette, fresh fruit, teas, percolated coffee, water and orange juice), morning tea (muffins, chocolate-chip cookies, fresh fruit, teas, percolated coffee, water and orange juice), buffet lunch (Beef Bourguignon with bacon lardons, caramelised baby onions, whipped potatoes and gremolata; chicken korma with saffron rice and baby pappadums; Peking duck risotto with baby bok choy, cloud ear mushroom and fresh coriander; spinach and ricotta gnocchi with red onion and tomato ragout and fresh baby basil; Caesar salad with shaved pecorino; teas, percolated coffee, water and orange juice); afternoon tea (Danish pastries, sour cherry brownies, fresh fruit, teas, percolated coffee, water and orange juice); canapés (sushi selection, roast duck and celery dumplings served in a steamer basket with hoisin sauce, salt-and-pepper tempura chicken with sweet chilli sauce). Special meal requirements included vegan, halal, jain and gluten free.

"Industry trends told me I was crazy to be holding this event in these new venues, but it was unbelievably easy given the situation," says event organiser Lisa Robinson of Spirited Marketing. "They always had everything I needed and I never had to ask for anything twice. The staff acted with such a sense of urgency and nothing was too hard."

"I had the same event manager on both days, during bump-in on the Sunday and for the event on Monday. This consistency is really important and helped make the event run seamlessly. During a busy set-up and conference program you don't have time to get to know new people."

"The main challenge centred around coordinating an event at a venue that was in its final stages of being built. The tradesmen made things such as a site inspection a little difficult. It all came together, however, with the conference and exhibition itself very much smooth sailing."

Shane Preston, Intercad business development manager: "Our aim was to create an event that proved valuable for our customers. Intercad is growing rapidly, and while we are a big player in the market we are not the largest in terms of market share. The event needed to be consistent with our messaging and positioning, so we needed a world-class event in a world-class venue. Peninsula well and truly met that requirement."

Robinson: "If you want to run a big event, this space is perfect. Peninsula has a good-sized exhibition area and the rooms are all right next to each other on one level, making it easy for

the room can be partitioned into three areas.

Preston: "With Peninsula in a converted cargo shed, the height of the ceilings and airiness of the room was conducive to a conference program. Delegates' attention levels remained high and there was little chance of people going to sleep. "As the conference was aimed at designers and engineers, the industrial feel of the venue worked well. We held last year's event at a five-star hotel in Sydney, which didn't really suit the audience demographic."

"The location was commented on continuously by speakers and delegates – how relaxing it was to be close to the water and how it added to the overall feel of the event. Most delegates rated the event four or five out of five. The feedback was excellent."

Robinson: "When you're running a conference program all day, it's really nice to have so much natural light and for delegates to be able to easily walk outside and get some fresh air by the water."

"Everything about Peninsula is first class, from the fittings and finishing through to the food and service. I would rate this venue up there with Australia's best five-star hotels. I have never worked with a venue that was so professional with such strong attention to detail. The team at Atlantic Group [V] really cared about making the event a success, which was so refreshing and made my job immeasurably easier. Their passion was evident. You get a different level of commitment when dealing with the owner/operator." 