

Tactical approach to quality



THE INTERNATIONAL Association of Congress Centres (AIPC) has come a long way in the past few years, with a broader membership, many new programme offerings and a much stronger role in representing convention centres in overall industry discussions. Edgar Hirt, the organisation's president, highlights the factors behind this success story

"Our job is to make sure we deliver exactly what our members need as we want to help them do their business," said Edgar Hirt, President, International Association of Congress Centres (AIPC).

In doing this, AIPC is guided by its mission to 'encourage and recognise excellence in centre management'. "We have many programme activities that address this, ranging from educational and research activities to guidebooks and the kind of member educational exchanges that take place at industry events," he said.

The organisation also maintains programmes like the AIPC Apex Award and the AIPC Innovation Award to recognize its members' achievements and encourage them to strive for even greater lev-

els of accomplishment. In addition, it is now implementing a formalised set of quality standards that relate to all key areas of centre operation, management and marketing, and an audit process to ensure members have the systems in place to maintain these standards in their centre.

"One of the things that always surprises us somewhat is how similar the issues facing centres are all over the world, and how many of us have reached the same conclusions on how to respond. That's what makes organisations such as AIPC, that provide a forum for discussion and the exchange of ideas and strategies, so valuable," Hirt said. "They allow us to share experiences and realise that there is a huge body of ideas out there to learn from."

For this reason, one area AIPC intends to focus on is ensuring it emphasises the quality of its membership rather than simply increasing numbers. "I think this is critical to maintaining the highly professional level of member exchanges that makes our association unique. I also see a need to balance the issues around the 'bread and butter' business – the ongoing, day-to-day business that pays the bills for most centres – with the global issues that affect the industry as a whole," he said.

"We believe that if we can successfully apply the lessons and standards of the global industry to our own more immediate challenges and opportunities, we will have achieved the right balance. At the same time, we'll be maintaining a leadership role for AIPC at a critical time for the future of the industry," Hirt said.

Edgar Hirt is President of the International Association of Congress Centres (AIPC); and Managing Director of CCH, Congress Center Hamburg

ABOUT AIPC

AIPC is an international association of over 155 leading convention and exhibition centres around the world. Its mission is to support, encourage and recognise excellence in convention centre operation and management and it supports this mission with activities designed to assist members in improving their level of management expertise in such areas as operations, finance, technology, staff development, marketing, client relations and environment. It is based in Brussels, Belgium.

For further information, contact marianne.de.raay@aipc.org or visit www.aipc.org