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IMEX THE WORLDWIDE EXHIBITION FOR INCENTIVE TRAVEL, MEETINGS AND EVENTS

GCB
Meetings made in Germany
GCB German Convention Bureau



AIPC probes economic outlook

Two of AIPC's most important activities of the year take place at IMEX 2008 – the AIPC/ICCA Seminar and the AIPC Sales and Marketing Summit.

This year's seminar, 'Storm Clouds or Silver Linings', addresses the impact a global decline might have on the meetings business. AIPC members will be joined by senior representatives from ICCA, PCMA and MPI to debate any lessons learned from experiences earlier in the decade, and what new approaches have been developed that might soften the impact of economic fluctuations. The panel will also examine the implications of a possible slow down on supplier relations and expectations. This session will be of interest to suppliers, clients and event organisers.

Positive feedback from previous summits encouraged AIPC to follow the same programme as recent years. The summit which took place on Sunday combined identifying key issues, seeking input from outside observers and collective problem solving. Continuing changes in market conditions provided good opportunities for sharing experiences and expertise with colleagues.

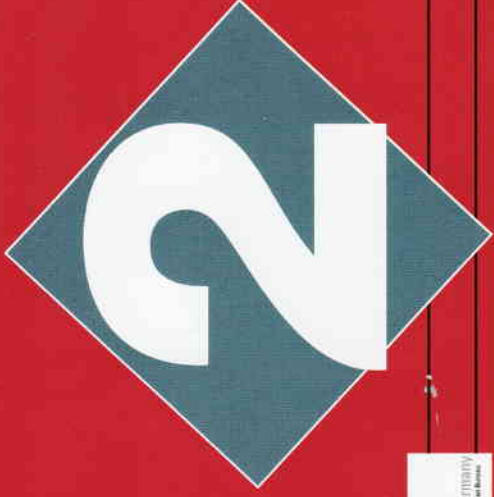
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The IMEX interview

Edgar Hirt, president of AIPC

AIPC, the International Association of Congress Centres, represents more than 155 of the world's leading convention and exhibition centres. Its mission is to support, encourage and recognise excellence in convention centre operation and management. It supports this 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. AIPC is based in Brussels, Belgium.

certainly be one, and the impacts of pharma codes on medical meetings another. Members also want to know how well new techniques like marketing alliances and yield management systems are working. We will also be dealing with things like the new opportunities and challenges that internet marketing affords – something the rest of the world seems to be doing, and which we need to look at more closely for our own industry. Above all, we'll be taking advantage of the information we all have to share with each other, and the perspectives that our clients are able to give us, because these are the best resources we have to work with.

Q Having a successful congress centre within a community obviously lends both economic as well as political status to a region. However, some destinations are better at capitalising on this than others. With this in mind, what message would you like to send to the politicians taking part in the IMEX Politicians' Forum?

A I would like them to recognise just how broad the range of benefits created by a successful centre is to their communities. Too many governments only measure success on the bottom line; what revenues the centre generates or what economic impact it creates. But centres also promote

Q AIPC is committed to encouraging and recognising excellence in convention centre management and you never seem to lack for new members. Where's the growth currently coming from?

A More centres are realising that to compete in today's market, you need to be able to demonstrate a quality product. This quality comes from the type of programming AIPC offers plus the ability to network with other leading centres in the interna-



This well-known Belgian character makes himself right at home at IMEX 2008 on the Meeting Point Belgium stand E120.



Puppets play out mythical and historical events to delighted IMEX visitors at Taipei International Convention Centre (A325).

OALPC is committed to encouraging and recognising excellence in convention centre management and you never seem to lack for new members. Where's the growth currently coming from?

AMore centres are realising that to compete in today's market, you need to be able to demonstrate a quality product. This quality comes from the type of programming ALPC offers plus the ability to network with other leading centres in the international market. As a result, new members are coming from everywhere – not only emerging destinations but well established ones where the competition is now greater and where ALPC can provide an edge. However, new centres and destinations are emerging every day in places like the Middle East, Eastern Europe and the Far East as more places recognise the benefits that a convention and exhibition business can attract.

OLast year the ALPC surveyed its members on 'environmental issues and found that 'environmental reputation' is becoming a more significant decision-making factor for clients around the world. What were the most significant findings from that report?

AThe most important finding was that as convention centres we're way out in front in terms of a green agenda. In fact, more than 80% of member centres indicated they had environmental programmes and policies in place even though less than 10% of clients had made it a key decision factor. I believe that's because we know we need to be prepared for the demands that are coming, and that we're responding to the environmental expectations of our own communities, as well as those of clients. The good news is that because we already have these programmes in place, we are in a better position to work with clients to help them develop their own green agendas and practices.

OFor the third year, the ALPC International Sales and Marketing Summit took place during IMEX. What do you see as the hot topics for 2008?

AAnything that impacts centre marketing, and there are a host of issues. The economy will

well as political status to a region. However, some destinations are better at capitalising on this than others. With this in mind, what message would you like to send to the politicians taking part in the IMEX Politicians' Forum?

AI would like them to recognise just how broad the range of benefits created by a successful centre is to their communities. Too many governments only measure success on the bottom line; what revenues the centre generates or what economic impact it creates. But centres also promote education and professional development, advance business development and investment, help create a stronger image for the community and attract world-class expertise. These intangibles – the things that are more difficult to measure – tend to be overlooked but typically offer far more value in the long run.

OLooking ahead, what changes do you foresee at ALPC and within the congress centre global market over the next five years?

AA lot will depend on what happens to the global economy – a downturn would take its toll, because much centre business tracks how well business is doing. But as we learned during the last decline, ours is a very resilient business, and meetings and exhibitions are amongst the first to bounce back from any kind of economic disruption. That means we need to keep focused on the long term and make sure we're competitive with other forms of communications and marketing. ALPC's job will continue to be what it's always been – to encourage and recognise excellence in convention centre management – and we'll be looking for new ways to do that. We've added a lot of programming over the past few years – new education activities, the ALPC academy for professional development, new recognition awards and an entire quality standards programme. I think we now need to make sure these are all well established and operating successfully before we take on any new initiatives.

Edgar Hirt is also Managing Director of CCH, Congress Center Hamburg

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