

VALUABLE INSIGHTS FROM 50 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE! BY EDGAR HIRT - PRESIDENT AIPC



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When any organization reaches the ripe age of 50, it has a lot of history to look back on - and, hopefully, this also brings the kind of insights and lessons that can help steer a successful course for the future. This is certainly the case with AIPC, where the demands of an ever-evolving industry mean that centre managers need all the help they can get to anticipate and respond to the issues and opportunities they face on a daily basis.

We've learned a lot of valuable things in our last 50 years. We know, for example, how stable the industry really is and that the need for face to face encounters such as those provided by meetings, conventions and exhibitions are an essential element in the business, marketing and professional development plans of an organization. We've also

learned that these are not easily replaced by remote forms of communications like electronic communications, as was predicted for many years. And we know that the industry is an extraordinarily resilient one, as demonstrated by the way it rebounded following the terrorism and accompanying economic turmoil earlier in this decade.

At the same time, a number of areas have emerged as being critical to the success of individual operators in a competitive market, and while we have been able to respond to these reasonably effectively to date there is a lot more work to be done in the future. Let me give just three examples.

First, there is the paramount importance of **quality** - not just in terms of facilities, but of services, technology and even the overall delegate experience. As convention centre construction and renovation continues and the market becomes more crowded with top-end products, it is no longer enough to be simply acceptable; a centre needs to be able to truly distinguish itself if it is to remain competitive. This is and will remain a challenge for centres worldwide, particularly those which have to compete with new facilities which incorporate the very latest in design and technology.

The second is the **environment**. This factor has been propelled to the top of the priority list in many communities as well as for a growing number of clients, and is not likely to be going away any time soon. The good news is that most centres have already responded quickly and effectively, and in many areas are actually driving the sustainability agenda.

This is important as a means of ensuring that other environmental issues - those associated with long distance travel, for example - get put in proper perspective and weighed against the overall net benefits that arise from international meetings.

The third factor is **community interaction** - and the critical need for community and shareholder support. In most parts of the world, centres act as 'loss leaders' for the greater economic benefit they generate - which means they are often not profitable. A community and an owner (typically some form of government) need to understand this economic reality, particularly when faced with the operating deficits that often accompany even the most successful convention centres, and as a result, we've also learned that generating this kind of support is an ongoing responsibility.

These are only a few of the lessons we've learned, but they illustrate the value of experience in helping determining future success. As we move through our 50th anniversary year at AIPC, we'll be reflecting on them - and on the benefits we can draw from of a half-century of learning!



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