

Barbara Maple (AIPC) explains:

How an **Industry Organization** **can benefit members** and **clients Alike**

AIPC IS AT MOMENT THE MOST RISING WORLDWIDE ORGANIZATION IN THE CONVENTION INDUSTRY. ESPECIALLY AFTER THEIR LATEST CONFERENCE IN QUÉBEC, CANADA, LAST SUMMER, THE ORGANIZATION IS MUCH TALKED ABOUT. AIPC PRESIDENT BARBARA MAPLE EXPLAINS THE BENEFITS FOR CLIENTS AND MEMBERS.

TEXT HARALD ROELOFS | PICTURES AIPC

As the world of meetings, conventions and exhibitions grows ever more complex so does the array of organizations that represent its members. From the perspective of a supplier, the question is who best represents your area of interest and who can provide you with the best resources to support your business development. From the perspective of a client, the question is who can best identify your expectations and help to ensure that its members are committed to addressing these.

For a congress centre, and for congress centre clients, the answer is simple. AIPC - the International Association of Congress Centres - is the industry association for professional convention and exhibition centre managers world wide. It is committed to encouraging and recognizing excellence in convention centre management, while at the same time providing the tools to achieve such high standards through its research, educational and networking programs.

AIPC President Barbara Maple points to the unique position that the association occupies amongst the various organizations that represent the meetings industry. 'AIPC is a true international organization, with representation from over 140 centres and more than 50 countries around the world' says Maple. 'It focuses specifically on the issues, opportunities and challenges facing convention and exhibition centres. It celebrates and promotes the multicultural dimension of the international meetings

industry and the role facilities play in enhancing this. And it maintains close working relations with related industry organizations to ensure members are well connected to overall industry issues'.

Founded in 1958, AIPC is a professional, non-profit association of international congress, convention and exhibition centres devoted to the promotion and recognition of excellence in facility management. With a global network of the world's leading centres, its mission is to help members enhance management expertise in the areas of operations, finance, technology, staff development, marketing, client relations and environment.

AIPC addresses this mission with a variety of activities including:

- Developing and operating training and education programs;
- Carrying out industry research and analyses;
- Providing consultancy services for new facility development;
- Creating management and operating standards;
- Developing communication and marketing programs to improve industry awareness and promote the AIPC 'quality label', and
- Recognizing facility excellence through the annual AIPC Apex Award for 'The World's Best Congress Centre'.



▲ BARBARA MAPLE (AIPC)

"In the loop"

Together these activities represent the full spectrum of organizational activities necessary to keep members "in the loop" about industry developments and in a position to take advantage of them in growing their business. This has benefits to both those members and to their clients as well. The member perspective:

From the point of view of congress centres themselves, AIPC works because it offers the best possible combination of benefits and reputation. Belonging to AIPC not only gets a centre access to new and directly applicable resources but associates them with a brand and a set of associates that represent the best the industry has to offer. AIPC membership offers the ultimate opportunity to engage with professional colleagues and take part in a global network of top convention and exhibition centre managers. It provides a means for learning about and participating in the key issues and opportunities facing the industry, both today and into the future. At the same time, it provides access to the very latest in research, training and marketing to enhance a facility's performance. Members of AIPC benefit in a variety of ways:

- They're able to participate in industry wide discussions which are shaping the future of the global meetings business;

- They have access to AIPC commissioned research, analysis and consultancy on new industry developments, trends and standards;
- They join with other members in specialized training, educational and employee exchange programs aimed at raising operational standards throughout the industry;
- They're a part of AIPC's marketing and communications initiatives, which include participation in major trade shows, press releases and promotion of the AIPC Quality Brand;
- They have unique opportunities for exposure, including coverage in AIPC's newsletter *Communiqué* and the ability to compete for the annual Apex Award for 'The World's Best Congress Centre'.
- They also have access to the industry's most important annual event: the AIPC Annual Conference, which provides members with an opportunity to network with industry colleagues and access the latest in facility issues, technology and management information. The cost of registration for the Official AIPC Delegate is included in the AIPC membership fee.

Collectively, these opportunities deliver the full range of 'most needed' resources and affiliations for convention centres located anywhere in the world – and an >>>

association that supports and encourages members to raise their own standards to higher levels.

Says Maple: 'In all these areas, the biggest lesson is again how much we benefit from the ability to discuss these issues together and learn from the experiences we all have in our different parts of the world. By using our collective knowledge and expertise to advantage, we can stay on top of these new developments and plan strategic responses to them in ways that few of us could alone.'

The client perspective:

That's all very well for congress centres. But what about clients; those associations and corporations who use congress centre space and services to deliver their own program. Is there any reason that they should care about what an organization like AIPC does or stands for?

Yes, there is. And two examples provide evidence of this.

The first example is the need to improve and integrate services such that the client is getting the best and most efficiently delivered product possible. In an ever-evolving world, this is a big task – and one that requires not only the skills and resources of a centre but all the expertise they can acquire from partners and colleagues around the world.

'AIPC recognizes that as important as we all feel congress centres are in delivering a successful meeting, there are many other players that also have a key role to play', says Maple. 'Among these are such groups as the Professional Congress Organizers, or PCO's. Together such groups can achieve much more than they could individually, and it is the customer that benefits the most.'

This is the reason that AIPC has put such an emphasis on working cooperatively with other members of the industry in the past few years. Through such activities as joint seminars, reciprocal educational programs and shared publications AIPC and IAPCO, the counterpart organization representing PCO's, have found new ways to work better together and make the resulting program more efficient and cost effective for the client.

The second example is in the area of quality standards, something that AIPC has been refining for a number of years. Quality standards are a client's way of determining what they can expect from a centre before they even cross the threshold, and of getting the confidence they need that their requirements will be met.



'As congress centres, we're operating in an increasingly competitive environment, created by a combination of factors ranging from an increased supply of meeting facilities to new levels of service expectations by clients', says Maple. 'At such a time, both centres and clients need to find ways of characterizing the convention product in ways that have practical significance to everyone concerned. This is one of the key factors in AIPC's renewed focus on the development of meaningful quality standards, and an important part of the role AIPC plays in encouraging and recognizing excellence in congress centre management'.

'By establishing such standards and assisting our members to meet and even exceed them, we're not only helping make our members more competitive but assisting convention clients with their need to deliver engaging and exciting events for their own members'.

Value is on everyone's mind even as expectations rise – and what were considered to be luxuries only a few years ago – in the areas of entertainment or technology, for example – are now just something to be expected. Both centres and their clients are under steady pressure to come up with more innovative and cost-effective ideas in order to shape the congress experience in ways that will attract more delegates.

When an organization's primary objective is to raise their members standards of performance, everyone benefits. That's why AIPC is, and will continue to be, of interest and importance to the entire Meetings Industry for many years to come!