



Barbara Maple, formerly in charge of AIPC

Brain teaser: What should Edgar do now

SMOOTH SESSIONS FOR CONVENTION CENTRES MEETING IN SINGAPORE WERE ONLY SLIGHTLY RUFFLED BY LANGUAGE MISUNDERSTANDINGS AS THE INCOMING PRESIDENT STRUGGLED FOR A NEW DIRECTION

There were regular conference misunderstandings when the English language began its inexorable bid for world domination. And for some delegates for whom English is a second, or even third, language there still are. But now, English as the international lingua franca and, more often than not, the official language at international gatherings, is a foregone conclusion.

Therefore some surprise was expressed by an exceptional interjection on the subject during the assembly of international congress centre directors (AIPC) in Singapore. Most delegates tolerantly allowed the moment to pass un-illuminated and got back to the real business of the day, but the incident did serve to illustrate that old resentments die hard.

For new AIPC president Edgar Hirt of Hamburg, misinterpretation wasn't the problem. His was and is very much more real and direct. He has to decide whether to make his own mark or go with the flow. It's not easy. AIPC is 50 years old this year and heir to a worthy tradition. It has just emerged from four years under the glamorous guidance of Vancouver's Barbara

Maple and now Hamburg's Hirt needs to stamp his brand on the elitist group.

Founded on a paradox, however, it is an association which doesn't require new members and could be said to be an association in search of a purpose.

Education springs to mind, but by raising the standards of all, the best are creating new contenders for their business.

Another 'challenge' is how to head for sustainability while its customers, as shown in its own Key Issues Study, are still

Remy Cregut of Montreux that what is needed is the association to be run more like a business with a CEO and a board who would lay down policy and prepare members for new business. But time will tell. This is Hirt's debut as president.

He was lucky at least that he inherited a smoothly running secretariat which, aided by the ever-willing Singaporeans, made the conference purr along silkily.

However, things did not start well for football fanatic Hirt who stayed up most of the night before the opening ceremony to watch his national team lose to Spain in the Euro cup final.

Pieter Idenburg, head of host centre Suntec, was proud to have the 50th anniversary conference, but edgy. "I am more

"We should perhaps be looking at what we can do for the delegate rather than what the clients can do for the delegate." — Geoff Fenlon

dragging their heels on the green question.

It's a credit to the 160-strong group that it still accepts new members, while not actively seeking them, and willingly shares its advice, experience and education with all. It's an altruistic principle which, unlike the heavily-weighted marketing mission of the International Congress & Convention Association (ICCA), younger but stronger in centre membership than AIPC, leaves less room for manoeuvre.

Privately, Edgar Hirt might agree with

nervous now than addressing 2,000 doctors, because you are our peers and it is all about how we treat our guests." His team were roundly applauded, justifiably.

The traditional dragon dance which followed probably did Edgar's head no favours.

But he gamely looked ahead to "anticipate and prepare for what is coming. What enables AIPC to survive and what members learn about how to succeed are the questions we are going to debate.

Lead next?



Edgar Hirt, now AIPC's number one

Below, from left to right:

Kishore Mahbubani, National University of Singapore

Rod Cameron, AIPC's stats guru

"The secret is that we learn from each other and share our own knowledge and experience.

"The exchange of information among members will be very much in evidence at this conference."

Asian influences and significant industry factors were to occupy members for the next two and a half days.

Keynotes like that of enthralling

Professor Kishore Mahbubani, Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew school of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, who dazzled with his command, interpretation and predictions for the development of Asia in the decade ahead and its probable effect on the meetings industry.

Delegates had already been seduced the night before at the dinner held on Sentosa island and featuring the sounds and shapes of a Cuban dance show, sponsored jointly by CAT Publications and Suntec Singapore.

It is an endearing and enduring feature of AIPC assemblies that, like all family gatherings, social interaction is given high priority.

Rod Cameron, AIPC's resident stats guru, walked us through AIPC's Key Issues survey, scattering pearls such as "56 per cent of convention centres have their own management and 16 per cent are contracted management. When surveyed, most centres thought there was going to be more or similar levels of business with only 12 per cent saying less. One future challenge was the greater influence

simple solutions. Pavithran Nambiar, of Hyderabad ICC, simply wanted to know how to persuade people to come to India. Tony Xu, of almost-open China NCC, Beijing, how to get around seeking government approval every time he wanted to make a bid for business.

Athens' Clare Amsel wanted AIPC to take a longer-term view and be more mature.

Birmingham's Geoff Fenlon suggested,

"We should perhaps be looking at what we can do for the delegate rather than what the clients can do for the delegate."

There is more than one revolution going on in the convention centre management business at the moment. The individual personality

traits of the celebrity director are giving ground to the standard operating procedures of the global management company. Technology is beating common sense to problem solving. Delegates are becoming the clients.

And has AIPC past-president Barbara Maple handed Edgar Hirt a perfectly matured and balanced glass of wine to sip? Or a poisoned chalice? **ami**



wielded by PCOs and AMCs and another was reduced attendance at events.

And on sustainability, Cameron reported, "Some 70 per cent of members have already put a written formal policy about green issues in place and 80 per cent were implementing one soon, while less than 10 per cent had seen formal criteria in client bid documents."

The sheer diversity of AIPC often defeats