

At your service, Sir

Reed Travel Exhibitions' Meetings and Incentive Events' group exhibition director **Paul Kennedy, MBE**, says Singapore's Suntec has set a new service benchmark for others to note.

View point

Paul Kennedy



As I travel around the world, I receive, as many business travellers do, the full range of service standards, from the awful, to the excellent. Very rarely am I minded to think that the service I have received was truly memorable and world class.

I recently attended the AIPC Annual Conference in Singapore (as reported extensively in September's *CMW*). The conference itself was held at the Suntec Centre which also houses a significant retail mall and a vast range of catering outlets. The quality of the service at Suntec was probably the best I have ever experienced within a convention centre. The meticulous attention to detail, really excellent catering and a clear philosophy of helping the organiser to make the very best use of the facilities reflected a true benchmark for others to aspire to.

This lesson of service delivers 'Added Value', which is, in my view, of critical importance. I could not help notice the positive impact of the service levels on the mood of the conference organiser. Instead of a worry factor, the organiser was upbeat throughout, in the full knowledge that the centre staff were highly trained, proactive and determined to succeed.

The lesson of this very brief case study must be evident to all. Firstly, many of us that attended have told others in the meetings industry how good the service was. What price is this level of advocacy? As important is the lesson that staff not only need to be trained and fully briefed as to the expectations placed upon them, they also need to be empowered to act. I witnessed Suntec staff enabled to respond to various additional requests, both rapidly and with a 100 per cent 'can do' attitude. Such a practice requires the placing of trust and



Singapore's Suntec Centre, as viewed from above

confidence in the staff team.

Another major lesson is the attention to detail – I will remember the sight of several staff painstakingly aligning the bottled water, pen and pads with absolute precision. This level of preparation was also witnessed in the presentation of the refreshments and meals throughout the conference, with the chef brigade fully involved and visible with the design and construction of the buffet presentations.

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The overarching lesson was how an event was made memorable by the efforts of the venue staff. This conference also featured quite outstanding keynote speakers from Singapore, sourced by the venue. These speakers provided insight into the company values of a fast growing global hotel group, The Banyan Tree, and the dramatic rise in the economic, political and cultural positioning of Asia on the global stage.

Let's all throw down the challenge for all centres to live up to the standards I have

referred to and for event organisers to partner with venues to utilise their expertise and create memorable events for the delegates, the organiser and the venue. In doing this, we need to be willing to listen to what venues can offer. They will probably know how best their space can be utilised, including the logistics and presentational styles of catering.

If organisers are to partner with venues in an effective way, of fundamental importance is to accept the expertise of the venue. And perhaps for drawing up a service level agreement, setting out clearly a mutual understanding of what is meant by the highest of quality standards is advisable.

As an organiser of large events specifically for the meetings industry, my experience at Suntec will inevitably raise my own expectations of the venues used by RTE in China, the UAE, Australia, Spain and in the not too distant future, the USA and India.

Oil, Bernanke and Branson flex their meetings muscles

Paul Kennedy was recently judged to be one of the meetings industry's 25 most powerful people. IMEX's Ray Bloom, Richard Branson and ICCA's Martin Sirk were other Brits to make the cut.

They were all eclipsed by 'Oil' at No.1, however, in what was a very strange US survey for *Meeting News*.