

Industry view



This column is contributed by the International Association of Congress Centres (AIPC). AIPC is an international association of 160 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 is based in Brussels, Belgium. www.aipc.org

Convention centres and clients face common problems, says AIPC director of programming and international development, **Rod Cameron**

Common problems

While convention centres and their corporate and association clients may have their differences of opinion from time to time, they all share one overriding priority – ensuring the ongoing role of meetings as a primary vehicle for professional and business development. They therefore need to look for better ways to address shared concerns together.

AIPC and its members have identified future challenges for the industry. Here are some of the concerns:

- **Uncertain economic outlook:** It is axiomatic that the fortunes of the meetings industry tend to track the economy, both directly (as in corporate meetings) and indirectly (as in association meetings which, while booked well in advance, can still suffer

from lower attendance and spending during an economic downturn).

- **Sustainability:** The fact is that the only way to completely eliminate the environmental impact of a meeting is to not hold it in the first place.

This kind of consideration needs to be balanced against the very real benefits a meeting or convention delivers in terms of economic and social progress.

- **Increasing concerns about the carbon footprint of delegates, combined with fuel cost increases:** These are threatening enough on their own, but when combined with economic

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uncertainty become even more of a concern. One issue to be dealt with is the near-total absence of measures that calculate the economic benefits a meeting creates.

- **A shrinking work force:** The dwindling supply of specialised and experienced event staff means an expanded effort is needed to recruit, train and retain good people at a much higher rate.

Both centres and clients should look more intensely at what it takes to develop such skills and how they can compete more effectively with other sectors looking to attract the same people.

- **Alternative communications technologies:** While most agree on the fundamental importance of face-to-face encounters, the technology for remote meetings is improving significantly. Combine this with a “new generation” of delegates raised on the Internet and teleconferencing may become an irresistible option, at least for some types of meetings. Most in the industry would agree the goal should be to work at how such technology can be used most effectively to enhance meetings rather than replace them.

Any one of these issues could have a significant impact. However, it is the combination of them occurring at the same time that could have the greatest impact.

They all have the potential to reduce event participation. As a result, they are areas all parties concerned should be addressing collectively. ■

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