

How to secure a reputation

By AIPC president Edgar Hirt, who is also managing director of Congress Centre Hamburg.

More than ever in today's complex and competitive market, potential clients need a reliable means to assess the performance of a convention centre, while the centres themselves need a way to demonstrate their accomplishments.

All this suggests some form of rating or accreditation, something that has been lacking for a long time. Of course, credentials can be adapted from other areas such as hospitality or manufacturing, but these generally fail to really reflect the kinds of performance important to the management of a centre. At the same time, credentials developed in particular countries or regions lack the universality needed by clients who regularly seek venues worldwide.

For this reason, AIPC a few years ago undertook the seemingly overwhelming task of developing a performance standard specific to convention centres. It seemed overwhelming because of the huge

variation in centres internationally.

To be universally applicable, such standards have to meet a range of requirements: First, they need to be flexible and adaptable to a wide variety of venues of all ages and configurations; secondly, they need to be seen from a client perspective and be relevant to the market; third, they must be "graduated" so centres can address any performance issues; and finally, it should be seen that the standards were developed and are maintained by an external body using an external auditor, rather than by individual centres or management groups. This is a matter of credibility.

To achieve this, the AIPC board authorised a four-step process. Step one was to review other quality standard models as well as centre operations, and to define key areas where quality standards are appropriate. Step two was to

draft an AIPC version of quality standards based on this research, and to "test" these categories with representative member centres. Step three was to set out a procedure to allow centres to adopt the guidelines through an initial "self-audit". Finally, there was a formal process to allow centres to document their accomplishments and have these reviewed by an external "auditor".

Ten key areas of centre management are addressed in the standards developed: customer service, venue quality, service quality, employee relations, health, safety, security and emergency response, financial integrity, community relations, environmental responsibility, industry relations, and supplier relations.

Melbourne Exhibition & Convention Centre is one of seven centres in various countries that have to date



achieved the accreditation set out in the Quality Standards program. AIPC's challenge now is to enable as many members as possible to achieve this distinction.

We realise that it is yet another demand on centre managers who are already busy, but it is a way for centres to distinguish themselves for their performance in a way that will be increasingly recognised.

● For further information, contact Marianne de Raay (marianne.de.raay@aipc.org) or visit www.aipr.org.

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