

## CONVENTION CENTRES PLAY A CRITICAL ROLE IN ECONOMIC RECOVERY



LIKE MOST OTHER KINDS OF BUSINESS OPERATIONS, CONVENTION CENTRES ARE HEADING INTO WHAT PROMISES TO BE A VERY CHALLENGING YEAR. JUST HOW CHALLENGING WILL DEPEND ON THE MIX OF BUSINESS THAT ANY PARTICULAR CENTRE HAS.

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Associations seldom cancel their conventions, because they are such a fundamental part of their raison d'être and a big factor in their annual budgets. However, there may still be declines in attendance and associated spending, which obviously has important revenue implications to the host centre.

But this isn't just about how well a centre is doing, because the level of activity in a centre is also an important factor in gauging how the overall economy is progressing. Convention centres are economic drivers, and the kinds of events they accommodate are key factors in everything from business growth and investment to training, technology and professional development. When the centre is busy, it's a sign that things are moving ahead in these important areas. When they're not, it means that the kinds of activities needed to stimulate growth and development are simply not happening.

Meetings, conventions and exhibitions are how the world shares information and builds business relationships face to face. As a result, the level of activity in this sector is both an indicator and a facilitator of economic growth. In times like now, when the world needs all the economic stimulation it can get, we all need to think more creatively about how we can encourage even more of these kinds of events.

In fact, meetings are a big part of how the current crisis is going to get resolved. People need to get together, not just from the big institutions, but also those representing individual business areas as well, in order to develop strategies for reconstructing their business models.

They need to restore confidence and comfort levels in the market, and history has shown that this is best done face to face. As a result, anything we can do to promote and encourage these kinds of activities not only helps the industry but supports overall economic recovery as well.

### MEETINGS ARE A BIG PART OF HOW THE CURRENT CRISIS IS GOING TO GET RESOLVED. PEOPLE NEED TO GET TOGETHER

And what can we do? For a start, we can make it easier to develop, manage and promote these meetings. As centres, we need to be working harder than ever to remove any obstacles to staging events in our facilities, recognizing the kinds of pressures our clients are now under, and encouraging our suppliers to do the same.

There is also a role for individual business

people and professionals to play in both encouraging more diversified events and in helping attract them to their own city or region. This traditional 'ambassador' role not only encourages more productive meeting activity overall, but can help individual destinations build their profile as a meetings location.

Just as the "canary in a cage" was a symbol for environmental quality, so the level of activity taking place in convention centres is a key measure of business activity and, ultimately, economic recovery. More than ever, facilities, clients and suppliers all need

to be working together to ramp up this kind of activity as a way to help grease the wheels of the economy.

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