

Meetings help economy recover

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

Like many other businesses, convention centres are dealing with a challenging year, depending on their mix of business.

Corporate meetings and events are generally the first to react to a business downturn because they are impacted most quickly, and typically have shorter booking periods. The major question is if they will be one of the many sectors most directly impacted by the economic situation. Associations seldom cancel conventions because they are such a fundamental part of their *raison d'être* and a big factor in their annual budgets. But there may still be declines in attendance and associated spending, which

obviously has revenue implications for the host centre.

However, this is not 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 host are key factors in everything from business growth and investment to training, technology and professional development.

When a centre is busy, it is a sign that things are moving ahead in these important areas. When

a centre is not busy, it means that sort 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, so the level of activity in this sector is both an indicator and an enabler of economic growth. Now, when the world needs all the economic stimulation

possible, we all need to think more creatively about how to encourage even more of these events.

In fact, meetings are a big part of how the crisis will be resolved. People need to meet, not just from the big institutions but also from individual business areas in order to develop strategies for rebuilding 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.

So what can be done? First, there is a need to make it easier to develop, manage and promote meetings. Centres need to be working harder than ever to remove obstacles to staging events, recognising the pressures faced by clients, and encouraging suppliers to do likewise.

Indeed, every sector should be revisiting the role that meetings can and should be playing in restoring business activity and confidence. Formats that worked previously may not be the best

today, so there is a need for flexibility in thinking and designing new approaches.

Finally, individual business people and professionals need to encourage more diversified events and help attract them to their own city or region. This "ambassador" role not only encourages more productive meeting activity overall, but can help

individual destinations build their profile. In the end, everyone benefits because a successful event stimulates economic activity.

More than ever, venues, clients and suppliers all need to be working together to ramp up activity as a way to help grease the wheels of the economy.

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

EYE ON EXHIBITIONS



Planning vital for success

Exhibitions and events provide a marketing medium perfectly suited to the art of relationship building. It is the only medium that brings face-to-face interaction and builds relationships.

But to make the most of events, careful planning is essential. Here are a few tips on laying the foundations for success...

Set specific goals.

While there is nothing wrong with aiming high, it is important to be realistic about outcomes. The tighter the goals are, the better the chance of achieving them. Establishing specific, measurable goals is perhaps the single most important thing to do before an event.

Choose the right staff.

The mix of disciplines and number of staff manning a stand or the exhibition floor should also be goal-driven. It is also a good idea to be aware of the first rule of exhibitions: people make the show. For this reason, staff should complement or enhance your goals. Make sure these goals are not only understood, but also that each member of the team knows their specific role.

Make the most of promotion.

Visitors need to be made aware of the type of companies participating at an exhibition or event, and why they should attend. Company promotion need not be a "last-minute" exercise, particularly if costs need to be contained. Encouraging staff to personally invite potential and existing clientele will indicate a high level of professional service. Do not underestimate the power of in-house promotion. It can save stress and also dollars.



MATTHEW PEARCE
President,
Exhibition & Event
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