

ICCA  
insights

## Popularity brings power

**You may not feel this way when you look in the mirror, but you're now generally recognised by the global meetings industry as the most attractive, recession-proof meeting planners around.**

An IMEX/ICCA survey has shown that a clear majority of international association planners have had static or even slight growth in delegate numbers at their major events this year, with not quite half the respondents saying sponsorship and exhibition revenue has been negatively affected. Meanwhile, in the corporate meetings sector, mass cancellations and slashed budgets have been the norm.

And now we're seeing mega-marketing resources being lined up to attract your business. At recent discussions with senior officials in China and Japan I was

told that international association congresses were now a top priority, and that increasing efforts were being made to support their nationals in getting on to boards and committees in the hope of influencing decisions. Market leaders like Barcelona, Paris, Singapore and Vienna are not going to stand by idly as the competition heats up: you can expect even more invitations to promotions and site inspections, and a flurry of formal bids from all regions of the globe.

While it's nice to be popular, hopefully this will translate into increasing negotiation power to gain decent prices and large enough room blocks. In this cyclical industry, where buyers and suppliers alternate in who has the upper hand, association executives should make full use of



An open letter to international association executives from ICCA CEO Martin Sirk.

their newly won popularity to cut the best deals possible; and once recovery comes creeping around the corner, they should take every opportunity to remind suppliers of their long-term importance.

These are relationships you will want to stay as loving as possible for as long as can be feasibly managed. We can only hope the suppliers won't be seduced by the bulging wallets of the corporate market once it rediscovers its appetite for meetings.

## centre points

# Crisis chance to highlight economic role of convention centres

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



**Convention centres are now feeling the impact of the global economic crisis after having enjoyed some of the strongest business years on record.**

While the impact varies with the location of the centres and their business mix, some commonalities are emerging that give a sense of where the greatest challenges lie.

First, corporate events tend to show the most immediate and profound effects. Centres have seen cancellations and delays in booked corporate business, while association events have maintained even bookings while assessing what impacts to expect on attendance.

Secondly, there have been significant changes in the timing of event bookings. Again, associations are more stable given their typically lengthier booking periods and the fact that some events may "straddle" the recession. But there are also significant and growing delays in the booking process –

particularly in terms of contracting – as organisers seek to keep their options open as long as possible.

A third factor is that it is becoming increasingly hard for centre managers to estimate financial impacts. While the more stable business (that is, association conventions) stays on the books, there are potential declines in attendance and revenue that will not be evident until the events actually take place.

Centres are already responding to these challenges in several ways.

First, they are re-engaging with clients to see how they can work together in addressing their common concerns over attendance, requirements and potential changes in programming. This kind of dialogue enables centres to plan more effectively and clients to better avail themselves of the experience and insights of centre staff. At the same time, it can help

build relationships with positive long-term benefits.

Secondly, centres are looking at other revenue sources. This includes re-examining the importance of the local client base.

Third, they are re-engaging with colleagues through industry associations and events that enable them to keep better track of market developments and to also share strategies for business survival and growth. This kind of communication is more important than ever.

Finally, many centres are recognising that the crisis is a chance to showcase the key economic role they play in their respective communities. By showing how events can stimulate business growth and confidence, they can make a positive impression that will last long beyond the crisis.

● AIPC, [www.aipc.org](http://www.aipc.org)

## EYE ON EXHIBITIONS

exhibition & event  
association of australasia

### Let it be flawless on the floor

With the Australian Federal Government's announcement it will spend \$20 million over the next four years to create a new international brand for Australia, there is much talk around the industry about the country's place on the global business scale.

Right now we have a strong "leisure" image, and while we do not want to lose that, it will benefit the nation and event industry if we also boast a reputation for serious business and success.

The reality is this: Europeans need travel only up to four hours to arrive at a convention centre anywhere on the Continent. Australian centres are eight hours' flying time beyond Asia's business hubs, so convincing organisers to hold events in Australia is essential.

While our amenities are comparable with Europe and Asia's finest, our geographical isolation means the international market needs to be sure Australia represents value for time and effort.

Obviously, the government, the association and industry need to work together to "sell" Australia. While global considerations may seem somewhat out of the realm of a company's exhibit at a trade event, the truth is that every event, every exhibitor and every visitor contributes to the overall perception of business in Australia. So it is necessary to look at the macro level of the event industry to help both build Australia as a business brand and to ensure it lives up to expectations.

Delivering on time and effort for international delegates and visitors means that each person manning a stand at an exhibition needs to be knowledgeable, enthusiastic and efficient. Otherwise, international visitors could leave disappointed, feeling that they wasted their time, effort and money.



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