

CENTRE POINTS



Setting standards for the future

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

Universally recognised quality standards are going to play a growing role for convention centres in the face of growing globalisation and rising client expectations.

At the same time, these standards document for a discriminating market a centre's accomplishments.

Centres have typically developed in relative isolation, with few cities having more than one convention centre. This has meant that for a long time there has not been any universally accepted accreditation. Now we are seeing more efforts to develop standards, driven in many cases by client concerns as to what they can expect in venues and destinations that are new in the market, and in other cases by a more metrics-driven approach to site selection, often by third-party planners who need a measurable basis for their recommendations.

Some centres have used credentials essentially adapted from other areas such as

hospitality or manufacturing, but these generally fail to really reflect the performance values important to centre management. At the same time, credentials have been developed in different countries or regions that lack the universality clients seek, especially if they have international event rotation.

For this reason, AIPC undertook the challenging task of developing quality standards specific to convention centres. The standards had to meet a range of demands, including a need to be flexible and adaptable to a wide variety of venues, ages and configurations; they had to be seen from a client perspective to be relevant to the market, and they had to be "graduated" in order to give participating centres a way forward in addressing performance issues. Finally, they needed to be developed by an arms-length body like AIPC, using an external auditor, in order to maintain credibility.

Ten key areas of centre

management have been developed under the standards: customer service, quality of facilities and operations, employee relations, health, safety, security and emergency response, financial integrity, community relations, environmental responsibility, industry relations, and supplier relations. To qualify, centres must demonstrate that measurable policies and procedures are in place for each key requirement in a form that can be reviewed and assessed by an external auditor.

At AIPC, our challenge now is to enable as many members as possible to achieve this distinction. We realise it is another demand on managers who are already busy with meeting client expectations. However, it is a way for centres to distinguish themselves for their performance in a way that will be increasingly recognised in today's highly competitive market.

● AIPC, www.aipc.org

YOUR VIEWS

Is it really their business?

It's time to limit travel for pleasure. Why should tourists be allowed to explore the world at their leisure? Look at all the carbon emissions they generate, all for a good time on that trip of a lifetime after 40 years of working to save for their holiday.

Worse still are those more fortunate well-to-do people who cross borders to spend time in the sun in their retirement. Then there are business executives who like to spend the weekend relaxing in the sun, recharging their batteries to enable them to face another week at the grindstone reeling in the dollars to fund the next excursion.

One has to ask: is it vital to society that these people be allowed to squander carbon credits on purely enjoyable activities?

It would be a brave politician who declares war on having a good time. So what happens instead? They pull the rug out from under the feet of the generation that is hard at work generating the income to support our burgeoning aging population.

Does that make sense? Not really, but it is more politically palatable to pick on business tourism and point the finger at those travelling for business. But when the finger of blame is pointed, where are the other three fingers pointing? Back at the person casting the blame!

It is time for business events to revolt! We are not leisure and pleasure – we are meaningful and progressive. We generate revenue for governments to provide for the less fortunate or those who

need funding.

We demand respect and will not tolerate the constant nitpicking for political gain. We are serious about networking to advance our society, and it is important exchange that brings people across the globe to discuss cancer research, energy solutions and business practice.

Give us a break. Why not make it mandatory that every trip include a business event? That would generate healthy economies, fruitful exchange and local revenue for all those businesses that depend on tourism.

Roslyn McLeod,
managing director, Arinex, Sydney.

EYE ON EXHIBITIONS



Be in for a tweet...

There is much buzz at the moment about Twitter and its business benefits.

While there are many sceptics, organisations cannot afford to ignore such innovations, especially when marketing events. A Nielsen study has shown that 64 per cent of Twitter users are between 25 and 54 years old.

Enabling users to create a profile page and update ("tweet") followers, Twitter's point of difference is that each entry is limited to 140 characters. This means messages are short and sharp.

Twitter can be useful as a communication tool for exhibitors before, during and after an event. Twitter pages can be promoted by a link or a "Follow us" symbol in marketing materials.

At the very least, a Twitter profile in the lead-up to an exhibition is a worthwhile experiment in the power of social media. Be selective who you choose to follow, as they typically end up following you in return.

To be effective, Twitter needs to reach your target market and vice versa. For an event, announcing the company's involvement along with the date, time and venue are ideal for encouraging attendance. Regular tweets then can reveal product launches, demonstrations and competitions on site.

During an event, Twitter should be part of the marketing strategy. Updates should offer constant insight.

After an event, Twitter can report exhibiting success and future business plans, as well as other events.

The key to success is having something worthwhile to say. Even with 140 characters you can say a lot about your event or business and what you do.



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