

The green centre effect

AIPC President **Edgar Hirt** explains how convention centres' sustainable capabilities can help organisers manage costs.



The greening of meetings has gone from being a 'cause' that had to be argued, to something that is now largely just an expectation by all parties.

Actions taken by convention centres have gone a long way to making this possible: recent surveys have shown that almost 90 per cent of centres worldwide have significant and extensive sustainability policies and practices in place, including programmes that are available for their customers to use.

In fact, supply is far ahead of demand in this regard. Surveys show that a relatively small proportion of centre clients are making sustainability a big factor in their decision-making or programming.

The reason for this divergence is simple: as large, and most often government-owned, structures, centres are a very visible factor in their respective communities and must

respond not only to client expectations but those of their citizenry and governments as well. This means they are more likely to be leaders in environmental measures whether or not there is a strong market demand or, more importantly, a willingness on the part of clients to participate in the cost of such programmes.

However, the fact that 90 per cent of the time eco-programmes are already in place in a convention centre creates a great opportunity for organisers who want to make at least a gesture in the sustainability area.

By taking advantage of programmes that are already available, organisers can often save themselves a lot of time, and reduce

costs that would be involved in doing it all from scratch.

Here are some suggestions for 'going green' in a convention centre more efficiently:

1. Make it clear from the beginning of your negotiations with the centre that this is a priority for you. Facility managers are not going to be as sensitive to your needs if you don't tell them, and if they understand that this is a priority - even though it may not have been expressed clearly in RFP's and bid documents - they will be in a much better position to offer up cost-effective solutions.
2. Become familiar with the programme opportunities that are available in a particular centre and see how these match up with the interests of your organisation or membership. Again, the most efficient approach will be one that uses existing programmes in centres (i.e., recycling, energy management)

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rather than those that require a whole new approach.

3. Look at ways in which you can organise the event around taking advantage of green programme options. It may be possible to save a lot of time and potential costs just by making modest adjustments to different conference activities.

4. Make 'greening' a line item in your budget. Even if your commitment is a



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modest one, the simple fact of including this in a formal way will be a demonstration of commitment and make everyone - including your own staff - more devoted to actually accomplishing something in this regard.

5. Finally, plan to promote use among delegates. Any green initiative is only as effective as the degree to which individuals are prepared to participate, and this needs to be conveyed through conference materials and messaging well in advance.

In tough economic times, budget is the top concern, and anything that looks like it may require additional investment is a concern. Yet sustainability has remained a priority in the minds of most people around the world - and that includes convention delegates. By taking advantage of the 'built-in' capabilities most centres have developed, you can make a significant gesture in this regard without having to face major incremental costs.

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