



David Blanchflower, professor of Economics at Dartmouth College, USA



Rashid Toefy, CEO, Cape Town International Convention Centre

A realistic assessment of current challenges

From a warning that global economic concerns are far from over to the kinds of action centres should be taking in response, this year's AIPC annual conference addressed both industry challenges and the opportunities available. **By Edgar Hirt**

There are a lot of questions about where we are in the global recovery, what kind of industry is emerging from the crisis and what we should be doing



South Africa to host the 2013 AIPC annual conference

The decision taken at AIPC's general assembly this year in San Diego to select Cape Town as the 2013 annual conference destination is a very welcome one. Cape Town itself is a hugely attractive destination but the real issue for AIPC is the extent to which the Cape Town International Convention Centre represents the quality and innovation that reflects our objectives as an organisation. A great deal of the strength of our industry comes from the diversity of experiences we deliver around the world and the ways in which these inspire attendees. Our location in Cape Town will provide AIPC delegates with a great opportunity to experience a centre and destination that are at the leading edge of development in this part of the world and to see how they are using their special qualities to create a very unique product – one that has proven itself to be highly competitive in the global market. This type of exposure helps generate the kind of new ideas and thinking that ultimately benefit not just the industry overall, but also our individual member centres as they grapple with the challenges and opportunities facing the industry today. We look forward to working with the centre and its staff to make this one of AIPC's most successful conferences ever.

about it. The conference in San Diego was intended to use the very latest industry intelligence and insights to answer these questions and owing to the extraordinary efforts by both the global experts and AIPC colleagues who contributed to our programme, it succeeded far beyond our expectations.

The tone was set for the conference theme, 'It's all about change', by opening keynote speaker David Blanchflower, a former member of the Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee

and professor of Economics at Dartmouth College, who was also named Business Person of the Year by the Daily Telegraph. His strategic advice was followed by a series of reports on both major geographic areas and key sectors, including association business, the exhibition industry and event planners interacting with both corporate and association clients. The common themes were modest growth combined with an ongoing need for flexibility and caution. Presenters also identified the need for a greater effort to look for new services that can generate value for both suppliers and clients and new ways of organising business relationships that can again benefit both parties in times that are financially challenging for everyone.

Addressing the challenges

The third major component of the programme addressed the ways in which member centres are already addressing the challenges they face with a range of new planning, programming and community interaction. These elements include new approaches to revenue generation, facility

design and refurbishment, the rise of premium food and beverage and managing change in a centre environment. Also addressed were the ways in which centres in various parts of the world are adjusting their arguments around the role they play in economic development in order to attract new attention and investment from governments and communities.

Survey results

Driving much of the programme were the results of a comprehensive member survey carried out in the months immediately prior to the conference, which covered business confidence, performance results, key economic and business factors and new response tactics. The survey was completed in a way that enabled the wide variety of topics it contained to be broken down by region in order to enable a comparison of how various factors are playing out in different parts of the world.

What we learned didn't necessarily make those of us hoping for a speedy recovery entirely happy, but there was general



Panel discussion on how events are evolving: a user's perspective

agreement that a realistic assessment of business conditions, combined with a spirited discussion of tactics for response, provided members with the best possible value for their participation. I think we consider ourselves better prepared for the challenges of the future as a result of what was conveyed in the conference and this is the best outcome we could have achieved. **35**

About the author

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