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SWITZERLAND'S TRAVEL TRADE MAGAZINE

IMEX opens with a warning



IMEX chairman Ray Bloom addresses the opening ceremony in the presence of Lutz Vogt, Michael von Zitzewitz, Barbara Maple and Andreas Sakkas.



Maple: industry must confront skills shortages and sustainability.

Keynote speaker urges meetings industry to look forwards rather than backwards and tackle the many challenges that still need to be confronted.

It is time for the meetings industry to step back from reacting to short-term issues and instead look ahead to identify fundamental shifts that will shape the next 20-30 years, keynote speaker Barbara Maple told IMEX's opening ceremony. Maple, who is president of JIMIC and AIPC and general manager of the Vancouver Convention & Exhibition Centre, told delegates it is vital to recognise long-term key issues to ensure strategic options are not lost simply because no one looked far enough ahead.

Changing demographics will have an enormous impact, said Maple, highlighting the effect that the passing of the baby boom generation

will have on the labour force. «There will be a shortage of skilled workers and administrators on a scale like nothing we've seen before,» she said. Most in the industry know little about tackling a seller's market in the labour force, she added, but it is certainly something that must be investigated now, while there is still time. Equally important will be the effect that a skills shortage will have on clients' organisations and on their expectations from the meetings industry.

The meetings industry must also take a far-sighted look at the inevitable movement towards sustainability, said Maple. To secure its long-term future, the sector has to work out how best to manage its impact on, and interaction with, surrounding communities. Key driving forces will be the communities themselves who will increasingly demand sustainability, and the clients, who will demand it because their own

members will ask for it. Cost-effective operations in areas like energy and conservation, strengthening legislation for sustainable practices and building design will all prove to be crucial factors.

The meetings sector must improve and strengthen its profile in the community and in the world of business, urged Maple, raising awareness of what it is, what it does and what kinds of benefits it can generate for the community. Citing her own city of Vancouver, she pointed out that it will treble its convention capacity by 2008, but that it has taken ten years, and four different project attempts, to get the community and government support that has finally turned plans into reality. «Our world today is all about competing interests – where every area of business enterprise is to some extent competing for the same resources and support,» said Maple. ■ *JT*

Women's forum

IMEX continues its tradition of promoting women's issues in the meetings and incentives sector, with its Women's Forum 2006 today. This year's theme is 'Women in the workplace – business communications across cultures and genders'. The forum will be led by two well-known meetings industry leaders - Mary Casey, vice-president strategic account management for Starwood Hotels and Resorts, and Mary Power, president and CEO of the Convention Industry Council. The session will look at the differences in how we communicate in different settings within different cultures. ■ *JT*

HelmsBriscoe takes a bow

«We're really thrilled to be at IMEX this year,» said Patricia Durocher, managing director of HelmsBriscoe International, the world's leading venue site selection company, in an interview with the IMEX Daily yesterday. «We have a really strong presence – some 60 associates of HelmsBriscoe are among the show's hosted buyers, representing 19 countries. And we're exhibiting for the first time.»

In 2005, HelmsBriscoe's 750 associates in 32 countries reached a milestone by booking more than 2.7 million room nights.

«This makes us the top revenue producer for group meetings for every major hotel brand,» said Durocher – one of which, InterContinental, hosted a cocktail reception for HelmsBriscoe yesterday. In the first quarter of 2006, revenues increased by a further 36 per



HelmsBriscoe is hosting 60 buyers from 19 nations at this year's IMEX.

cent. Not surprisingly, the USA dominates in terms of associates and bookings, but international bookings are growing much faster.

«We're running 60 per cent ahead of last year,» said Durocher. «Our focus is on growing our international business.» ■ *NC*

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