

Meetings: More than just money



By Barbara Maple

Any discussion of the benefits of the meetings industry tends to focus on their economic impact – how much planners and delegates spend, and how all that translates into the community economy.

Considerable time and energy have been devoted in recent years to developing reliable and consistent estimates of these impacts as centres are increasingly called upon to demonstrate their value and the return they generate on government investment.

But meetings and conventions are about much more than simply generating visitor spending. We often lose sight of the overwhelming importance they play in business, trade, investment and professional development.

These non-financial benefits often far outweigh the financial side. Here are some of the benefits that may be a little less obvious:

Meetings mean tourists

Meetings and conventions attract visitors that would otherwise never have chosen to come to that destination.

Having come for the event, they get to see what the destination has to offer – and the destination gets the chance to sell them on an extended stay.

Pre and post-conference tourism is a well-established phenomenon.

The general rule is that people who travel the furthest are most likely to combine a meeting with some leisure

time, and spend even more money doing it.

And having experienced the destination as part of their meeting experience, delegates are much more likely to return as leisure visitors, often with their family in tow.

Meetings mean business

Conventions also generate business activity – and provide a focus for those who are interested in business development, new investment and product promotion.

That means that a community hosting these kinds of events has an edge on business development and an opportunity to benefit from the presence of high level decision makers and potential investors.

Convention centres don't just act as meeting places. They can serve as showcases for local products and investment opportunities. They also help attract audiences that otherwise couldn't be reached; a single meeting of influential business executives or technology specialists can do more to promote a city's exposure than years of promotion by officials.

Meetings mean professional development

Large events are designed to bring the best in any given field together where information can be shared and progress identified. It creates a big boost to local knowledge and skills in any discipline.

Medical conferences are a great example. They're decid-

ing what advances and areas are the most promising for the future, everything you'd like the local medical community to have access to.

Meetings improve quality of life

Finally, there's the role that convention centres and the kinds of activities they support play in enhancing the overall quality of life in a community.

In order to survive, a community needs some kind of industrial activity, preferably one that brings in money from outside the local economy. A lot of those industries are less than completely benign, particularly from a community or environmental perspective.

The convention business, on the other hand, does more than simply avoid damaging its host community. It actually thrives on the kind of qualities people typically want around them – things like an attractive environment and cultural attributes – and provides a sound economic reason to support and enhance these qualities to everyone's advantage.



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