Centres and Hotels: The Love/Hate Equation

The relationship between convention centres and the hotel community is a very important one that can produce significant mutual benefits. However, it also has some potential inherent conflicts.

The first is something I could call The Profit Paradox, where I’ve lost count of the number of times I’ve listened to centre industry colleagues complaining in the same conversation about high hotel rates and also the lack of hotel rooms without appreciating the irony of what they were saying. We in the industry need to fully understand the supply/demand dynamic and yield management philosophies, and that a sustained platform of profitability is needed to drive and underpin the next wave of new hotel investment which both needs and drives new demand and new room stock.

In that regard, we all know that a major convention centre generates room nights in the many hundreds of thousands for local hotels, both at host properties and through significant side meetings, hospitality events and entertainment spread out across the city. This helps support the investment argument, which is good for all.

But as many of us have regularly heard from major global convention clients – who in addition to generating lots of direct economic benefits and room bookings deliver many thousands of high profile professional delegates and can enhance a city’s profile and reputation – some of the most challenging discussions and negotiations they experience are with hotels; securing appropriate room blocks, confirming rates and agreeing on release or attrition conditions.

We all know that our clients – as high yield as many are – are not the only customers a hotel has. But these kinds of issues illustrate the inherent short term vs. long term conflict that exists in our relationship. Venues work in the long term with lead times of up to 8 years, while the hotel industry and hotel managers work in much shorter timeframes. In fact over the period leading to a major international event there could be two, even three, changes of GM in any hotel that our client is also dealing with.

Our hope must be that hotel owners and investors understand the need for longer term positioning for the city and thereby securing their long term property investments, particularly for when that inevitable glut of rooms follows the current sellers-market conditions. The reality is that hotels typically receive a much higher proportion of the delegate spend than the centres that hosts them for their event. in the same city, in our case only about 8-10%. That seems to be a more than reasonable trade-off for a higher degree of cooperation than often exists.

As with most centre interfaces, this is nothing that can’t be solved by better co-operation and collaboration which in turn needs to be driven by enhanced dialogue and communication. The point is that instead of just complaining, we should all be investing more in that process – and underlining to everyone that when the relationship is successful, we all benefit.

“...the relationship between convention centres and the hotel community is a very important one that can produce significant mutual benefits. However, it also has some potential inherent conflicts.”

Geoff Donaghy, AIPC President
The program brought together both industry expertise and a range of related speakers who collectively offered insights into both industry-specific topics as well as how other business sectors are dealing with similar issues in an effort to encourage the widest possible spectrum of thinking. “The AIPC Annual Conference program always seeks to combine the expertise of our members with relevant outside perspectives and this year’s theme particularly lent itself to such a combination” said AIPC President Geoff Donaghy. “Today, the ability to both compete and adapt to changing client expectations are the greatest urgencies facing our members and by seeing how others have addressed the same kind of challenges while considering strategies for their own future produced the best possible outcomes”.

Global thinking with local applications:

Global thought leaders such as John Thackara, author of How To Thrive In The Next Economy, Robert Govers, Chairman of the International Place Branding Association and Gary Kayye, President and CEO of rAVe Publications looked at topics ranging from global economic transitions such as disruptive business practices, destination brand development and maintenance and emerging technology while Simon Naudi, founder of the international consultancy Answers Training helped members identify and assist in developing strategies for adaptive responses required by centres in planning for change.

The common thread amongst these diverse presenters was the need to recognize and respond to change as representing opportunities that can be used to advantage. Members were encouraged to look at how other sectors – sometimes related, as in the case of the education and accommodation areas - had embraced and absorbed changing market expectations and used them to become more competitive and recognizable. There was also a stress on the importance of adaptive responses as reflections of the “real” product rather than simply a promotional device – an approach that applied as much to new facilities and services as to destinations themselves.

Putting it in context:

A key part of the program agenda was devoted to examining what the practical application of these principles might and has been in specific city case studies. In this regard Xavier Theret, Head of International Promotion and Relations for Le Voyage à Nantes in the host city outlined the massive transition they have undertaken since the loss of a major business base to redefine the city in terms that made it more attractive not just to new residents but as a visitor destination and location for start-up companies looking for a more accommodating location.

From a very different perspective Tracy Halliwell, Director of Business Tourism & Major Events for London & Partners outlined how that organization had fundamentally transformed the relationship between the Meetings and Conventions area and London-based business and academic communities through the pursuit of new development strategies culminating in transformational events such as London Tech Week.

Keeping up with the neighbours:

Other Conference sessions explored adjacent areas impacting centre business development, including an analysis of the critical accommodation sector by Elizabeth Winkle, Chief Strategy Officer for Smith Travel Research and a global expert on the hotel industry as well as how the global exhibition business is evolving according to Kai Hattendorf, Managing Director at UFI, The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry and Eric Préat, Vice President, Product Development, Artexis & easyFairs Group.

Again here, the common thread was rapid evolution rather than a return to models and practices of the pre-recessionary past. Examples in the hotels area included the role of new competition such as AirBnB and new models for investment and consolidation, all of which have implications for the form and availability of accommodation for centre-related events. In the exhibition area, ongoing event transition was again the theme, with examples put forward of event formats with major implications for centre managers, including an increasing use of non-standard facilities (or even none at all!).
AIPC Survey Shows Solid Business Growth, Adaptive Strategies

The results of AIPC’s 2016 Performance and Prospects Survey demonstrated solid business growth for the 2015 operating year combined with ongoing strategic responses to changing industry conditions and increasing customer expectations.

This survey has been tracking industry performance and confidence levels for seven years, which has enabled a rigorous analysis of long term factors through a period of global financial turmoil followed by recovery. High survey response rates, which this year topped 65%, have made it a highly reliable indicator of core centre issues and performance, and facilitated data break-outs that enable both global and regional comparisons, making it a highly useful tool for centre planning.

For 2016 the survey was enhanced with the addition of two new and highly relevant topic areas: first, centre security measures and policies and secondly, the role and scope of subvention as a component of centre marketing.

Amongst the key findings for 2016 were;

> Centre revenue was unexpectedly strong, showing a solid 8% growth in 2015 in place of an anticipated 4.2% increase projected in the 2015 survey. This compares with a 5.8% increase in 2015 and 3.1% in 2014; however, for 2017, members are expecting more subdued 4.2% revenue growth.

> The strongest regions and markets continue to strengthen – but the weaker are getting weaker. When asked the question: How do you characterize the current strength of overall economic activity and business growth in your region? 21% of members this year characterized overall economic growth as strong compared to only 13% in 2015 but an increasing number also saw greater weakness that previously.

> Adaptation and business diversification – the themes of the 2016 AIPC Annual Conference – were identified as big priorities for centres, with almost 60% having implemented a business innovation over the previous two years and 40% having added a new revenue stream in that same period.

The innovation rate was highest in North America and Australia, where 69% and 67% respectively indicated they added an innovation or important new process.

> The top areas for innovation development and implementation were Technology, Food & Beverage and the Client Venue Experience. These have proven to be the key areas for centre innovation for several years, and reflect what centre managers see as offering the greatest opportunities.

> Changes to organizer and event producer expectations are accelerating, with many events changing their formats, mainly to better serve more technologically savvy attendees and respond to less formal event structures. A key trend is the increased use of public space and different educational and networking formats to better address changing delegate needs.

> Most centres are confident of having solid security measures and policies in place, with the majority having completed recent reviews in this area but relatively few changes made as a result. This comes in the face of increasing concerns by clients who are more than ever wanting to confirm the security area has been properly addressed.

> Subventions – the offering of discounts and enhancements to clients – now appear to be an established part of the market landscape, with over 53% of centres reporting they have increased such support over the past five years. However, it was also clear that these were being provided strategically, being offered up for key clients in return for meeting specific criteria such as repeat business or specified levels of economic impact.

> Funding for subventions tended to be drawn from a range of stakeholders including local government and the hotels community in addition to centres themselves, again in return for specifically identified benefits.

The survey also incorporated results from various user groups as a complement to the views provided by centre managers. Primary amongst the concerns raised by these groups was a need for centres to be able to respond to changing event formats and spatial needs in the face of rapidly changing event formats, and for them to be more pro-active in suggestion new approaches to the use of their facilities and services in creative way.

The study was developed and carried out in collaboration with Michael Hughes, Managing Director of Research & Consulting with Access Intelligence Research & Consulting.

In reacting to the 2016 Survey results AIPC President Geoff Donaghy commented “This annual survey gives a broad and comparative picture of how change is developing around the convention centre world and how centres are responding in both practical and business performance terms. This information is invaluable to managers who must take into account a wide range of factors in setting both their targets and their expectations for the future of their respective operations.”
But the fact is that there are huge implications to all this that extend far beyond our own immediate reactions. What is at stake is no less than the future of our industry – not just because of the fear factor and the event cancellations and relocations that may result but also because of the likelihood they will provoke greater security measures and potentially even a weakening of cross-border agreements that have facilitated travel in recent years. Together, these could conspire to reduce travel inclinations at a time when industry recovery was only just beginning to gain traction in many parts of the world.

So this is clearly not a situation where we have the luxury of passively sitting back and watching events unfold. These incidents appear to have become part of a new reality, and the key question is: what can and should we do in response? I'd suggest there are three things we need to consider;

The first is perspective – maybe the toughest of all in the face of recent coverage – and here there are several aspects. First, the approaches now being taken by terrorists mean that no major destination is truly immune – we can't operate on the assumption that there are "safe" and unsafe options when recent events have made it clear that such incidents can and have taken place anywhere in the world and even in the air between. At the same time, media hype notwithstanding, most incidents have been relatively contained – frightening in their viciousness and seeming randomness but in reality affecting only a tiny proportion of the population even in the most dramatically affected areas. It remains the case that visitors are far more likely to be impacted by any number of other impacts than the actions of terrorists.

The second factor is vigilance – and again, there are again several dimensions to consider. Most importantly, we need to accept that we all have a responsibility to our members, clients and delegates to take and support every reasonable measure to manage and minimize the direct threat in any way we can, and this is particularly true for suppliers whose decisions and actions shape the conditions that would form the backdrop for any incident that might occur. Organizers, facilities and suppliers all have a major obligation to not just secure their own operations but to coordinate with other agencies that would potentially be involved should an incident occur – in fact, a better coordination of efforts seems to have been one of the top recommendations arising from those incidents that have already taken place.

However, this responsibility also extends to counseling against the kind of over-reaction that would place draconian measures on travel overall, as this only serves to create a downward spiral that would in the end cause even more damage the incidents themselves.

And that brings us to the third most necessary and at the same time challenging action - a measure of defiance in the face of what is clearly an effort to disrupt not only the benefits but even the values that bring people together in joint efforts to improve the quality of our global understanding, cooperation and interactions on so many fronts. To the extent that we react out of fear and resort to isolation (or, at a minimum, the isolation of selected destinations) we become accomplices, delivering exactly what those responsible for the atrocities are looking to achieve.

Our industry has a proud history in this regard. In previous global disruptions, including both terrorism and any number of recent economic or financial crises, it was typically the case that the business travel sector – including meetings, convention and exhibition attendance – was a leader in recovery. So far, it appears that this remains the situation today; in most terrorist-impacted cities, early reports are than tourism has been hit much faster and harder than scheduled business events. The clear message is that we have a key role to play in defying the disruptive purposes of terrorist acts by refusing to respond as they would like us to – and that means showing leadership in maintaining our event schedules and our rotations in ways that demonstrate our collective commitment to global engagement and participation.

None of this will be easy – fear is a powerful motivator, as those responsible for these incidents know only too well - but then it's not as though there are any easier choices available. What we risk is becoming part of a reaction that produces the kind of success the terrorists are looking to achieve – and for the sake of our industry's future, we must lead the resistance.

Rod Cameron
Executive Director, Joint Meetings Industry Council

EDITOR'S NOTE:
Delegates to the 2016 AIPC Annual General Assembly in Nantes voted to accept a proposal from Istanbul to host our 2018 Conference following a superb presentation from the Istanbul host convention centres. At the same time, a new policy was approved that will provide for a backup destination to put in place for this and all subsequent conferences in the event that the designated host is unable to accommodate the event as of 12 months from the Conference date.

Following acceptance by the General Assembly AIPC President Geoff Donaghy said “We thank Istanbul for a great proposal, and I might add, one that not only offers a great destination and product but also an opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to supporting our colleagues by behaving the way we'd like to see clients react in similar situations! As we discussed in our conference program, no destination is invulnerable today, and standing firm in our collective resolve is the only appropriate reaction for us to take as an industry”.

OPINION: Taking a Stand on Terrorism – a JMIC Perspective

Reading the news from various cities impacted by terrorist actions around the world these days is almost enough to make you want to go back to bed and pull the covers over your head. But for most of us – particularly in the Meetings Industry – that simply isn't an option; life goes on and that life necessarily involves travel to places that include those unfortunate enough to have been targeted.
A highlight of the 2016 AIPC Annual Conference this July in Nantes, France was the presentation of the 2016 AIPC Apex Award to the Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre of Australia.

The Award, made in recognition of the highest client rating received by a convention centre, was made from a group of 15 finalists, all of whom had qualified for the competition by achieving a high level of client testimonials to serve as the basis for the independent evaluation and analysis now used for adjudication by the international market research firm Ipsos.

In receiving the Award BCEC General Manager Bob O’Keeffe said the win was the pinnacle of the Centre’s 158 industry awards, and the highest global acclaim both for the Centre’s capabilities and for Brisbane as a leading international meetings destination.

“It is a great honour, and I believe a tribute to the dedicated and passionate AEG Ogden team that has operated the venue for the past 21 years”, said O’Keefe. “The AIPC Apex Award is an international benchmark for industry excellence, and we are excited that we have managed to achieve this kind of recognition”.

AIPC President Geoff Donaghy said that because the Award is based on an extensive analysis of customer input via detailed surveys it reflects an unbiased picture of a centre’s performance as seen through the eyes of its customers.

“Staying ahead in a global industry means continuously raising the bar,” said Donaghy. “The AIPC Apex Award analysis is an extensive one that is able to make the distinctions that separate even the highest performing centres and covers a range of categories including facilities, project management, customer relations, catering, creativity and technology,” said Donaghy. “With almost 1,000 client assessments going into this year’s award, we are able to clearly distinguish the factors that are generally most important to clients in their determination of centre performance, which gives our members an additional insight to drive performance”.

“I want to congratulate all finalists because simply achieving the required number and spectrum of client testimonials needed to qualify is a major achievement,” said Donaghy. In any case, we truly feel that everyone is a winner in this process, as beyond simply identifying the winners and in fact creates important information and insights that drive overall centre performance. These insights can be and are in fact used to great advantage to all entrants to advance their products”.

2016 AIPC Apex Award 15 finalists:
- Aberdeen Exhibition & Conference Centre
- Adelaide Convention Centre
- Kongresskultur Bregenz GmbH
- Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre
- Darwin Convention Centre
- Durban International Convention Center
- CCD Congress Center Düsseldorf
- Hawai‘i Convention Center
- Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre
- Kyoto International Conference Center
- Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre
- Palais des congrès de Montréal
- La Cité Nantes Events Center
- Salzburg Congress Center
- Uppsala Konsert & Congress AB

The AIPC Board also recognized two runners-up to this year’s award;
- Kongresskultur Bregenz GmbH, Austria
- Hawai‘i Convention Center

“Our runners-up also deserve recognition, given the very high standards required to compete in this program”, said Donaghy.
Facility Operations Summit to Focus on Key Strategies for Integration

Barcelona November 27 and 28

Recognizing the growing importance of a trend already well established in previous Summits, this year’s Facility Operations Summit in Barcelona at ibtm World on November 27-28, 2016 will be built around the concept of an interdisciplinary approach to service delivery with a series of topics that bridge the areas of building operations, event management and sales interface.

A number of today’s most relevant management areas, from security and risk management to integrated client servicing and from outsourcing to function space adaptation will be explored from a range of perspectives in an effort to develop better strategies as to how a range of different centre staff, along with outsourced suppliers and even outside community organizations can better collaborate for a superior result.

“Today’s complex facilities and markets are increasingly demanding a more interdisciplinary approach to servicing business, and this has been the direction that both attendance and content have been taking at the Facility Operations Summit for some time”, says AIPC President Geoff Donaghy. “This is a very rare opportunity to have this kind of discussion and I would urge all members to take advantage of the Summit to promote that kind of approach in their own buildings”.

The Summit is one of the few events that enable centre operations managers to interface with both counterparts from other centres and a range of global clients and suppliers in an intense and collaborative networking environment. Registration is limited so centres are urged to book their participation early via the AIPC Secretariat office.

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Patrons of Professional Development: Recognition and Perks for Academy Supporters!

Amongst the details of AIPC programming addressed during the General Assembly in Nantes was a new initiative designed to both recognize and reward ongoing supporters of the AIPC Academy. The concept is based on the importance of members making an annual commitment for at least one staff member to attend the Academy each year for three years, which is hugely important in a number of ways:

> Providing recognition for consistent supporters in the important role they are playing by supporting AIPC professional development.

Said AIPC President Geoff Donaghy “As centre managers, we all know that the best way to achieve this is by making an annual commitment as part of our budget planning cycle – then it’s just a matter of deciding who will attend, which can of course be done at a later time. We will shortly approach all members to make such a commitment, and at the same time recognize those who have already achieved it with the years they have participated. We will then recognize our Patrons, both at subsequent AIPC events and by inclusion in activities such as advisory panels, as well as providing special incentives to each centre that makes this commitment”.

Donaghy added that “We know these are small gestures in return for such a valuable commitment – but we also know, as do you, the value of ongoing professional development, and that is the real reward. Our hope is that you will support us in this initiative so that the additional stability will enable us to even further enhance what is already the top educational program of its kind in the world”.

He noted that a number of member centres that have already delivered on such a commitment over the past three years, including the RAI Amsterdam Convention Centre, CCIB - Centre de Convencions Internacional de Barcelona, Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, Manchester Central and the Singapore EXPO Exhibition and Exhibition Centre.

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WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS!

TRADITION AND INNOVATION – THE HANNOVER CONGRESS CENTRUM

True to the motto “Tradition and Innovation” the Hannover Congress Centrum combines historic atmosphere with modern facilities in the historic “Stadthalle” - more than 100 years old - with its historic Kuppelsaal and large festival rooms supplemented by a range of spacious function halls and more than 30 conference and seminar rooms. The entire HCC provides 41 halls & meeting rooms with a total event-area of 13,000 sqm and 15,000 seats.

The event catering and event technology at the HCC is provided in-house, as is an all-inclusive PCO-Service. This means customers will receive all the necessary services for their event from a single source, the Hannover Congress Centrum.

Adjacent to the Centrum is a city park of 60,000 sqm, which invites delegates to relax during events and can also be used for outdoor functions as well as the four star 258 room Congress Hotel am Stadtpark with direct access to the HCC. As an historic building, sustainability plays an important role and since 2011 HCC has been certified by Green Globe, with a 2015 score of 96%, making it one of the leading centers in Europe in this regard.

Says Joachim Koenig, Executive Director, “We look forward to improving our exchange with colleagues around the world, and want to know more about interesting and innovative projects while of course contributing our own know-how where it is helpful. Through this exchange we would like to improve our ability to take the right future decisions at the right time within an international framework”.

THE CSIR INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE, PRETORIA

The CSIR International Convention Centre (CSIR ICC) is situated in Pretoria, the capital city of South Africa. It was the first purpose-built International Convention Centre in South Africa and hosts over 700 national and international conferences, meetings and related events annually, offering world class facilities in natural surroundings, quality service and true value for money.

The CSIR ICC has two auditoriums seating 500 and 200 persons and equipped with modern technology including interpretation and voting facilities. The Centre has a further 11 multi-purpose venues as well as a large exhibition hall making it ideal for conferences with exhibitions. Attractive outdoor facilities such as the 700 person capacity outdoor deck, surrounded by natural woodland make this venue an ideal one-stop-shop catering for diverse needs and ensuring that delegates have a refreshing experience. Flexibility, service excellence and professionalism are key to what the International Convention Centre offers its clients.

It is located in the greater metropolitan area of Tshwane which is renowned for its natural attractions such as the Big Five Game Reserve and a concentration of research and academic institutions. Says CSIR ICC General Manager Bronwen Cadle de Ponte “Through membership of AIPC, whom we view as the leading association for congress centre management worldwide, we have no doubt that we will learn a great deal as the association provides such rich educational content and we hope to also be able to contribute to this pool of continuing education for our industry”.

WTC EVENTS CENTER, SÃO PAULO

The World Trade Center São Paulo, founded in 1995, is one of the largest multipurpose event spaces in a hotel complex in Brazil and a business hub where various segments of the economy are concentrated. It consists of the WTC Tower, a modern Office Tower with 25 floors, the Sheraton Sao Paulo WTC Hotel, the WTC Events Center, the WTC Business Club and the D&D Mall, the largest center of decoration in Latin America.

Its five-floor, 12,000 square meter area is divided into more than 60 flexible spaces to accommodate large cultural, corporate and social events. Among these are the Golden Hall, a multipurpose arena of over 3,000 square meters with 15 meter high ceilings, which has been the stage for major events, from concerts to large international exhibition trade shows. Overall, it has the versatility to accommodate events from 5 to 2500 people with all the necessary infrastructure and a specialized team to deliver your event.

João Nagy, Asset Manager at the WTC São Paulo says “We aim to serve and enchant our customers with an experience of the best place to hold business meetings in South America. In joining AIPC we aim to exchange best practices with other members to improve our overall positioning and constructively participate in benchmarking top event locations worldwide”.

Joachim Koenig
Executive Director

Bronwen Cadle de Ponte
General Manager

João Nagy
Asset Manager
Gala’s Automated Venue System Delivers Big Advantages for the Swiss Tech Convention Center

Situated on the campus of the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne in Switzerland the Swiss Tech Convention Center (STCC) is a landmark building of arresting beauty, yet sustainable and firmly rooted in function and efficiency. For STCC management, the Center’s extreme modularity forms the basis of its continuing operational and commercial success. Already fully booked until 2019, it undergoes more than 500 hall transformations each year, facilitated by over 40 pre-programmed configurations.

Primarily dedicated to scientific and academic events, the STCC features a fully adjustable hall of 3000 seats and a 2205-seat conference space with a 795-seat balcony. Equipped with the Gala Venue transformation technology, it can be automatically reconfigured from a full conference auditorium to an exhibition or banquet area (flat floor configuration) in just 12 minutes! Pleased with the speed of transformation as well as with the system’s operational reliability – absolutely no technical problems and no cancellations of scheduled events – they have been making weekly changeovers, and sometimes even more than one transformation within a single day as required by clients.

Given the venue’s vocation, 35% of the events held at the STCC were not standard performance-based activities, meaning that they would not have been possible in a fixed configuration auditorium. The Center has thus been able to implement a multifaceted program, including large conferences of up to 3000 attendees, banquets for awards dinners, cabaret entertainment events, product launches and exhibitions. While scientific seminars (half-capacity room configuration) and conferences for 500 to 900 attendees have remained the most commonly hosted events over the last two years, the venue has also accommodated world-renowned performance groups and individuals, as well as established companies such as the Swiss banks.

Central to this high level of programmatic flexibility is the Gala Venue transformable system, designed to be stable and rigid so that each configuration looks as seamless as a permanent single-purpose arrangement, with superior seats, acoustics and perfect sightlines in every assembly auditorium setting. According to STCC director Julianne Jammers, such a high-caliber, versatile hall is what makes the difference for clients, creating a strong incentive for rentals by meeting their wide-ranging needs. In fact, it has been in such high demand and so fully booked that managers are now in the enviable position of selecting future clients as those that will best represent the STCC and the EPFL.

In just two years, the STCC has established itself as a scientific center able to host multiple conferences and seminars as well as a broad cross-section of entertainment events. This unparalleled versatility, without sacrificing aesthetics and comfort, helped managers considerably in their efforts to achieve productive occupancy and financial stability – a major accomplishment!