Centres Need to Demonstrate Role in Economic Recovery

With the whole world focussed on the same thing – the global economic crisis – we have an unprecedented opportunity to show how centres and the kinds of events we host contribute to economic development and why we will play a key role in economic recovery. The real question is, do we have the will – and the information – to make this a priority.

Increasingly, governments are making major investments in areas they think will support recovery. We are now seeing that most often, these investments – “bailouts” is the popular term – are linked to a variety of performance measures. One of the effects this is having is to advance the notion that areas like meetings, conventions and exhibitions are to be about serious business, and not simply an opportunity to engage in a free trip somewhere. We need to embrace this kind of definition because it underlines the serious nature of business events, and makes for a stronger linkage between what centres do and the larger economic and professional development concerns people have today.

At the same time, we need to be documenting our economic value more carefully than ever, and building a strong and credible case for the hard impacts we are having on our respective economies. We need to find new and better ways to quantify not only revenue and immediate economic benefits based on delegates and planner spending, but also on the broader benefits we generate in terms of enhanced investment, business development and even improved productivity. This will not be easy – if it were, it would have been done years ago. But it is necessary, particularly in a time when every economic sector will be competing for attention, not to mention funding.

There are two aspects of this job that should be emphasised. The first is that it is an opportunity to reconnect with our clients, with whom we share a lot in terms of what we have at stake in the current debate. If meetings and conventions fail to emerge as one of the most important tools for economic recovery, we will be bypassed by other aspects of the business and marketing process and everyone loses. However, if we can advance this argument successfully, our clients will have better participation and we as centres will have improved revenues. It only makes sense that we seek a closer relationship and a better working partner-ship to make meetings more effective and better appreciated.

The second aspect is that while industry associations will and are doing everything they can to advance the value equation at an overall industry level, the strongest arguments are those we make in our own communities. This is where the impacts of our activities have the most immediate effect, yet in the face of all the other challenges we face in times like these, community relations is typically well down our list of priorities. This needs to change.

I challenge all of you to think about how you can remind your communities and governments of the important role centres play in times like these, and how economic recovery will depend on the kinds of activities we host and support. If we can do this job effectively, we will emerge stronger from the current turmoil. If we don’t, others will take our place in the list of community business priorities and we will continue to be seen as simply venues for the initiatives of others.

Edgar Hirt, AIPC President
This year’s AIPC Academy held at the Dolce la Hulpe near Brussels in early February continued the process of educational evolution that began with the inauguration of the program three years ago. The Academy is now settled into a curriculum and a format that effectively delivers on its original promise, which is to offer an opportunity for new or rising managers within member centres to enhance their knowledge of the industry in preparation for increasing responsibilities.

The faculty of the Academy was increased this year to nine members, and the content was further enhanced by the addition of two special presenters representing the client perspective and the area of convention centre design. Program content was highly interactive, with individual presentations enhanced by a variety of exercises and “interventions” by various faculty members which provided different perspectives on key topics. The faculty represented seven different countries, which further broadened the content of the curriculum and ensured that the content was as diverse as the industry itself.

New this year was a student challenge in which attendees worked on a simulated “consulting project” throughout the course of an expanded six day program. The challenge was designed to encourage participants to demonstrate their growing knowledge by planning for a hypothetical centre expansion, and in the process, applying the new information they had gained from instruction as well as interactions amongst themselves.

Four teams competed in the challenge, which resulted in four very different, highly detailed and innovative responses to the exercise. Selection of a winner proved a tough job for the faculty evaluators given the extraordinarily high level of quality and the variety of approaches taken.

“The Academy has really come into its own, and defined its niche in the array of educational opportunities available to members”, said Academy Chair Barbara Maple. “It is the only such program that is entirely focussed on the challenges and demands of our industry, and as such, can specialize in ways that no other programs can. We intend to build the program year over year so that it remains as current and relevant as possible, and becomes an essential step in the progress on anyone pursuing advancement in the industry.”

WINNERS of the first AIPC Academy Student Challenge

left to right | Angela Foley | Irish International Convention & Exhibition Centre, Dublin
Hannah Winter | DüsseldorfCongress. Veranstaltungsgesellschaft mbH
Heini Taskinen | Helsinki Exhibition & Convention Centre
Prashanth Kuchimanchi | Hyderabad International Convention Centre
Christian Dubugnon | Montreux Music & Convention Centre
Rohit Maini | Sydney Convention & Exhibition Centre

All competing teams delivered superb responses to the challenge of creating a centre development plan set as part of the Academy program.
Industry Reacts to Pressures from Global Economic Crisis

While industry reaction to the growing global financial crisis was muted as recently as last November, when confidence indicators were still showing relatively little impact, events have now overtaken the complacency and numerous surveys are showing significant and growing impacts. Many centres report that they have been hardest hit by cancellations of corporate events, with most association bookings being more stable due to a longer booking cycle and a reluctance to cancel what for many associations represents their core function and primary source of revenue.

One of the problems of reconciling industry impacts with overall economic measures has been the lag time built into many industry surveys and the rapid pace at which conditions have been evolving. At the same time, the fact that many major events remain “on the books”, and that actual attendance and revenue estimates remain unchanged pending global developments may be distorting what will actually happen when those events actually take place.

The effects are taking different forms in various regions. In the US, for example, one area of great concern has been the identification of conventions as examples of unnecessary corporate spending under the terms of emergency public funding measures. A coalition of major industry associations has been formed to address this issue, and to propose a set of “responsibility” guidelines in place of outright bans that would lead to huge economic and job losses in the meetings sector.

One area that may actually benefit from the economic crisis is the construction of new centres or the renovation of existing ones. Centres may qualify as “public buildings” in some areas, thus enabling them to qualify for new government infrastructure funding being rolled out as economic stimulus. At the same time, the cost of construction, which in many areas had reached very high levels, is in many places dropping as the cost of both labour and building materials drops.

The course of the impacts on meetings and conventions will clearly depend on what happens in the overall economy, and how quickly signs of recovery appear. One of the fears is that structural changes may take place in the interim as meeting planners and both association and corporate executives look for alternatives to more costly meetings.

“We will all have to keep a close watch on how events develop over the months ahead, and develop our own contingency plans if conditions remain poor for any length of time”, says AIPC President Edgar Hirt. “However, we have seen many times before that meetings and conventions are essential elements of most corporate and association strategies, and that they are amongst the first activities to rebound when conditions improve. That should give us some comfort that we will see better conditions once the global crisis subsides”.

Imex99 Presents Important Member Opportunities

Again this year, IMEX presents all the opportunities associated with a gathering that brings together industry representatives from all different sectors and many different parts of the world. This year, it will be doing so against a background of major and growing concerns about the state of the global economy and the impacts this may have on our industry.

AIPC has shaped its participation accordingly, with a number of events designed to address key issues and create a forum for discussions not only amongst ourselves as centres but with client groups as well. Amongst the offerings on deck:

MAY 24 | The 2009 Sales and Marketing Summit
To make it easier for members to engage in the Summit program and encourage the widest possible participation, AIPC is waiving one registration fee this year for each member centre.

MAY 26 | Politician’s Forum
Once again, AIPC will be a key participant in this important annual forum that brings together industry leaders with government officials who represent the destinations and facilities that host events for a productive exchange on advancing the industry.

MAY 27 | The AIPC Industry Seminar
This year’s seminar will be an important update in the business and strategic plans of both centres and our association and corporate clients. We’ll be looking at how each of us can help the other deal with the consequence of global economic upheaval.

MAY 28 | AIPC’s participation in the PCMA Seminar
As part of the IMEX program, AIPC will be collaborating on a session to look at the centre / client interface and identify areas where better communication and collaboration is needed. At the same time, we will be completing what we expect to be a very important Board meeting and, of course, hosting the A Coruña cocktail reception which is becoming a staple feature of our trade show participation and an opportunity for AIPC members to gather and get the latest information about our upcoming Annual Conference.
With the implications of the global economic crisis expanding daily, the 2009 AIPC Annual Conference will be one of the most important gatherings we’ve ever had, providing opportunities to both learn more about the course the crisis is taking and the kinds of strategies that are being developed by both clients and suppliers to survive and grow under challenging circumstances.

The Conference program is being designed to address both of these areas as effectively as possible by providing the very latest in information and insights along with plenty of opportunities to share information and experiences on how the industry is responding and how this response will evolve in the future. Members should make plans now to attend and participate fully in order to prepare themselves for what may lie ahead.

On the more positive side, there has seldom been as attractive and contemplative destination in which to carry out these important deliberations. A Coruña is a lovely city with a fascinating combination of history and natural beauty, and at the same time is home to a number of hugely successful international businesses whose accomplishments offer an inspiration to all who visit. It is an unbeatable combination, and one that will prove just right for an event of important consequences.

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**Here’s our Preliminary Program:**

**Positioning Your Product for Success in the Current Crisis:**

On the principle that every challenge creates an opportunity we’ll be hearing from a global authority on what centres can expect as a result of the current crisis and how they can respond to advantage.

**How We’ve Been Impacted; How We’re Coping**

A panel of AIPC member facilities from different parts of the world will compare notes on how they have been impacted and what they are doing about it, addressing such questions as what impacts are members feeling in different areas? What do they see in the year ahead? What has been the reaction of owners? What strategies are they using to respond? What about financing/ investment?

**Where does this leave the “Green Agenda / CSR”?**

Current public opinion surveys show that sustainability is off the table, yet many centres have invested heavily in this area. How do we put the green issues in perspective today?

**How do they relate to overall CSR policies and practices?**

**Our Industry Partners: Airlines and Hotels Perspective**

A panel of airline/hotel/supplier representatives will outline where they are at present and how they plan to deal with current circumstances, including the roles of restructuring, marketing, financing, and simply surviving.

**Results of AIPC Outlook 2009**

AIPC’s annual member survey will be the first to demonstrate the full impacts of the current crisis on members centres, along with the range of strategies they are adopting to manage business.

**Strategies for Survival**

Given the information on impacts, tactics and global prospects, member participants will engage in a discussion of how, given current conditions, we can do better as both centres and as an association. The results will shape AIPC program priorities as well as help share ideas and strategies that are proving effective in different parts of the world.

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A Coruña Social Program Takes Shape

A very special location like A Coruña calls for an equally special program to take full advantage of what the destination can offer. Amongst the activities planned for the 2009 Conference program are:

**Informal reception and dinner at the A Coruña Royal Yacht Club:**
Settle in and meet with your Colleagues in an informal get-together at the A Coruña Royal Yacht Club on the La Marina dock, just a few steps away from Palexco. Renew acquaintances and catch up on the latest industry information over tapas and drinks in the A Coruña style!

**Visit to Santiago de Compostela:**
Santiago de Compostela is the Capital and “showcase” of Galicia. It is a city that combines the traditional with the modern, the tradition to be seen in its outstanding cultural legacy which earned it the distinction of being declared a UNESCO world heritage site in 1985

**Welcome Cocktail & Dinner: A Coruña Opera House:**
One of the most dynamic and beloved show centres in the city, the Opera House is home to prestigious concerts and musical events, such as the Symphonic Orchestra of Galicia and the Mozart Festival. This event will include a performance by an internationally recognized artist.

**Galician Wine Tasting:**
From ancient times, different varieties grown in Galicia have produced magnificent red, white and rosé wines such as Ribeiro, Albariño, Godello, Mencia and Rosal. A prestigious sommelier will guide guests through the scents, colours and textures of this fascinating world, introducing guests to a wide selection of the best Galician wines in a fun and easy way.

**Tapas Dine-around:**
At night, the streets of A Coruña take on a new life; crowded with lively places to have a drink, enjoy some delicious tapas and share music with colleagues and locals. The Galician wine tasting will be followed by a free evening and Tapas dine-around to our host’s recommendation of the best tapas bars in town!

**AIPC Award Dinner:**
The AIPC Award Dinner is a traditional high point of the Annual Conference, where we will be recognizing the winners of the 2009 AIPC Innovation Award. This year, we will be celebrating this important event in the elegant surroundings of one of the oldest and most traditional hotels in the city - the Victoria Hall at the Finisterre Hotel.

You won’t want to miss this range of activities as a highlight of your conference attendance!
As its name suggests, the Innovation Award recognizes the creation of new approaches in any aspect of management, marketing or operation of convention centres. Competitors were featured in a poster session held as part of the conference, and the program was a big success, with numerous participants and entries that covered a wide spectrum of centre activities, from technical to food and beverage to marketing and everything in between!

The next AIPC Innovation Award program will be held in conjunction with the 2009 Annual Conference in A Coruña, and we expect a similar level of participation and competition for the top honours. All AIPC members in good standing are eligible to compete in the Innovation Award, and again this year, entries covering the full spectrum of centre activities will be accepted for competition. Your entries should be limited only by the imagination of your program staff and your ability to demonstrate what their innovations achieved!

Three such initiatives will be recognized from submissions made by AIPC member centres. Once again, all competitors will be able to demonstrate their accomplishments in an interactive poster session and winners will be featured as a major part of the conference program.

Full entry details and requirements are contained in the AIPC Innovation Award Application form which is available on the AIPC web site. There is a deadline for submission on April 30, 2009, after which all submissions will be reviewed by the selection panel and recommendations brought forward prior to the Annual Conference.

As with the AIPC Apex Award, evaluation of submissions will be carried out in a way that recognizes the importance of client opinions as well as those of peers and business academics. A panel will be assembled under the auspices of the AIPC President to review submissions and make recommendations for the award. The evaluation process and final results will be audited by two AIPC members appointed as program auditors by the AIPC Executive Board.

The emphasis in judging applicants for the AIPC Innovation Award will be on how effectively the innovation addresses its stated objectives, which may be to improve efficiency, increase marketability, effect cost savings, achieve environmental goals or improve market position. The evaluation criteria that will guide the panel of judges are outlined under the Innovation Award Evaluation Criteria section.

The winners of the AIPC Innovation Award are accorded the same level of recognition now given to AIPC Apex Award winners. Publicity will be achieved through trade media, member communications and industry presentations. At the same time, winners will be given the opportunity to profile their winning innovation as a case study to be presented as part of the Annual Conference program.
A WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

AIPC continues to welcome new members that are even further enhancing our global reach and representation. Amongst the newest of our colleagues to join are:

BRUNSTAD CONFERENCE CENTER (BCC)

BCC was designed to accommodate large scale events, and is characterized by its functionality and flexibility. It has Norway’s largest concert and conference hall at 4,800 square meters and a seating capacity of 6800, along with 800 apartments located in and around the conference center.

BCC is idyllically located in the picturesque Norwegian countryside right next to the sea, while strategically positioned just outside the metropolitan area at a distance of 20 minutes from Sandefjord Airport Torp and 1.5 hours from the capital city Oslo. The technical equipment and facilities provide unlimited possibilities for presentations, banqueting and entertainment. The conference hall is state-of-the-art with a flexible staging, lighting, a fantastic sound system and sharp picture quality on three huge screens.

Says Randi Smith, General Manager, “I am very excited by what AIPC membership will provide us in terms of an environment for networking opportunities and ideas-sharing. In order to succeed in establishing BCC as a top-quality convention and conference center, I believe it is vital for us to actively participate in the sharing of new ideas and development in the collaborative international arena. We have every intention of placing Norway and our venue on the world map and I am confident membership with AIPC will be of invaluable help in order to realize this success.”

WORLD TRADE AND CONVENTION CENTRE, HALIFAX

Trade Centre Limited (TCL) is a vertically-integrated, major event organization with six business units, anchored by the World Trade & Convention Centre (WTCC), Atlantic Canada’s premier convention and events centre. Combining elegant world-class facilities, comprehensive services and the natural hospitality for which Maritimers have long been known, WTCC is situated in the heart of downtown Halifax, and currently offers over 100,000 square feet of total function space, including a 40,000 square feet of exhibition space and 23 break out rooms.

Fully integrated with the WTCC facility is the 10,000 seat Halifax Metro Centre, a major full service trade show, sporting event and entertainment facility. The downtown complex provides in total over 100,000 square feet of exhibit and meeting space. In addition, Exhibition Park, a four-building complex on the edge of the metropolitan area, can accommodate trade shows, exhibitions and many other types of events. Other business units under Trade Centre Limited include Ticket Atlantic, Events Halifax, which operates to help the province attract large cultural and sporting events, and World Trade Centre Atlantic Canada, an international trade organization which supports Atlantic Canadian companies with vital trade services.

“Halifax’s scenic northeast location in North America makes this seaport an ideal entry point for European travel to North America,” says Scott Ferguson, TCL’s Interim President and CEO. “It’s the perfect spot for international congress activity with strong North American support, as was the case when TCL hosted the Microcredit Summit in 2006. In joining AIPC, we look forward to even greater opportunities to shine the spotlight on our facility and our region. Belonging to AIPC puts us in great company, alongside other facilities dedicated to delivering excellent, world class events.”

ARADE CONGRESS CENTRE, ALGARVE

The most recent addition to the facility scene in the Algarve, Arade Congress Centre is also the only one exclusively focussed on accommodating congresses and meetings for up to 1000 delegates along with exhibitions, concerts, products presentations and corporate events. The centre, with its theme of “Sunny Events” offers the most up to date technology for all types of events, is located in Algarve, facing on the Arade river and just 60km away from Faro International Airport. Along with its on site facilities, the centre has easy access to the main hotels, of the area, with 6000 rooms nearby.

According to CEO Marcos Carvalho Pereira, the main goal for the Arade Congress Centre is to put the region and infrastructure “on the map” of major event destinations by offering exceptional conditions to the organizers and promoters of all types of events, as well as to exploit synergies between the Congress Center and Portimão Arena, with its capacity for 4,000 pax, in promoting Algarve and Arade region. Strategies to attract both national and International business include combining the exceptional attributes of the region with modern and functional infrastructures and a professional team that assures a high standard of services in a sunny surrounding as well as including private partners, municipalities and the Algarve tourism office in the development of specific products for this market.

Says Pereira “For international markets we see AIPC membership as a added value for our program as it enables us to share knowledge and experiences with our colleagues from the best Congress Centres of the world, and we can assure other members that the Arade Congress Centre.Algarve will contribute to an increase the market perception of the high quality of AIPC members centres”. 
With competition growing and many members seeking a way to create an “edge” in the market, AIPC is seeking new ways to ensure that members can benefit from their association with the organization. To create a focus for this concern, AIPC President Edgar Hirt has commissioned a package of activities designed to enhance the value of the AIPC “brand” in positioning members at a superior level in the market.

“We have decided to focus on facility and management quality, because this is both directly related to our mission as an organization and is a way of helping distinguish AIPC member facilities in the market”, says Hirt. “Because management quality is so fundamental to AIPC, we have many of the programs and resources required to advance it already in place, and it remains for us to make these programs more comprehensive and accessible to members”.

Hirt has commissioned AIPC Past–President Barbara Maple to lead this initiative on behalf of the Board, and states that she will be focusing on three areas over the next six months. “First, I have asked her to provide support and guidance to member centres who are pursuing the AIPC Quality Standards designation, and to assist them in completing the audit process which will give them accreditation. Secondly, she will be helping to advance the AIPC Academy as a professional advancement center for member management staff in her capacity as Chair of the Academy. Finally, she will be developing a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) statement and program for AIPC to help bring the association into line with other major associations which are developing similar codes”. “All of these areas are linked, and all will help support our assertion that AIPC membership confers a higher level of operational and community competence, and provide members with the tools and recognition necessary to support that assertion”, says Hirt. “We will be evaluating our progress in each area and reporting back to members at the Annual Conference in A Coruña. On behalf of the Board, I want to thank Barbara for having volunteered to carry out these areas”.

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Member centres who wish to avail themselves of the support that will be provided in achieving the AIPC Quality Standards designation are asked to contact the Secretariat for details.

AIPC recognizes the following member centres for having successfully completed the AIPC Quality Standards Audit:

Lahti                         Lisboa                  Melbourne                San Sebastian                       Vancouver
Brighton                              Helsinki

President’s Quality Initiative Launched

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