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# War Creates New Challenges for Convention Centres

The lessons of the post 9/11 period may be of limited value in evaluating the impacts of the current Iraqi war on the global meetings industry, says AIPC President Barbara Maple.

“The events of 9/11 were a surprise – so everyone had to evaluate and respond without any real experience to go on”, says Maple. “Since then, we’ve experienced many different impacts, but have learned to live with most of them. Among these are delays in decision-making and contracting, changes in client relationships brought on by staff turnover and increasing expectations regarding security and access. The general feeling in the industry is that many of these changes were due to economic conditions and lingering transportation problems as much as anything related to political turmoil”.

“This time, however, everyone saw the possibility of war for some time, so event planners and organizers had plenty of time to prepare. The results include new corporate and association policies that may make it more difficult to do business without changes to contract and service procedures. At the same time, there are other factors, such as the length and intensity of the conflict and the political fallout from different perspectives on the war, that remain uncertain”.

Some organizations, particularly in the U.S., have developed travel restriction policies that limit the ability of meeting planners to encourage attendance, says Maple. There are also more formal expectations in terms of security and contracting requirements that convention centres will have to meet. Together, these may mean significant changes to services and license agreements that centres will have to address.

AIPC is recommending that convention centre members take the initiative to contact clients and address any concerns they may have up front. “Each event and client have their own needs and concerns, so there are few general rules that can apply to these new circumstances”, says Maple. “Now more than ever we need good communications within the industry along with a spirit of cooperation to ensure that the needs of clients are respected and responded to. It’s only by considering the specific requirements of each piece of business that we’ll succeed in steering a steady course through these current difficulties”.

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AIPC is recommending members take a number of steps in preparation for the challenges that may lie ahead. These include;

- Re-evaluating contracts and license agreements to ensure these are relevant to current circumstances and to identify key areas that would become important in the event of drops in attendance or cancellation resulting from war related impacts
- Preparing centre staff to deal with clients who have security concerns or who may want adjustments to event contracts or services
- Reviewing emergency procedures and crisis management policies to ensure they are up to date and appropriate to the needs of both staff and clients
- Considering new staff training in areas such as security, customs clearance and communications that will be of heightened interest to many clients
- Reviewing and updating information on security programs so that they are available for clients who have concerns in this regard.

“Meetings will be more important than ever when we emerge from the current difficulties and need to re-establish a better level of global understanding and cooperation”, said Maple. “As convention centres, we will play an important role in this process, and we must ensure that we’re ready to deal with the additional demands that the fallout from the war will create”.

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