

Making your Destination more Competitive in the Eyes of Buyers

Today's competitive environment for large scale meetings and events is causing destinations to have to increase their service offerings to create a competitive advantage. A good working relationship between the parties is critical to buyers, especially when comparing one destination to another. But just what is it that makes for good co-operation between the PCO, the convention bureaux and the conference centres? A frank discussion resulted at the recent DMAI-led seminar.

“Flexibility and a team partnership are key ingredients” said Luca Favetta, Senior Director Global Events, SAP EMEA. “Exhibitions are changing, some getting smaller, others larger, but it is an unknown quantity in today’s climate and therefore flexibility from the destinations is a must.”

From the PCO perspective, co-operation means avoidance of hidden costs. “Extra charges” says Patrizia Buongiorno, President of IAPCO, and MD of AIM-Group, “are often part of the package but inform us of them in advance so that correct and accurate budgeting can be made as well as informed decisions as to the choice of destination”.

“From an Association’s point of view” commented Karin Wouters, Federation of International Furniture Removers (FIDI), “we see the convention bureaux as the go-between between us, as the client, and all the suppliers, including the PCO and conference centre, thus restricting the number of times the client has to ‘retell their story’ and also protecting clients from endless suppliers vying for their business”.

“This is not always possible” responded Buongiorno who wanted a more team-based approach. “With a sharing of information, good partnerships and strategic alliances, and if we all work together, there is a marketing edge which enhances the destination. Whilst recognising that the CVBs bring everyone together, it is the PCOs who know of the politics which often exist between the Local and International Organising Committees”.

“True” acknowledged Wouters “We, the client, are the most important people in the equation, but often it does not feel like that as local politics get in the way. We want to be welcomed in a city and charging for small items, eg a city map, can create a bad feeling and make all the difference as to whether a client returns to that city again”.

Enrico Zuffi, representing the Convention Bureau of Geneva, felt that communication was the key especially in this current climate. “No-one wants to share a downturn in numbers, but such information should be an item for discussion. And if events at the destination are happening about which the client/PCO should be aware, for example, pending construction work, inform them, so that it can be managed. Think about the long-term effects in order to win the client back in the future. Talk and discuss openly and listen to what the client or PCO really needs/wants”.

Doug Price, DMAI, facilitating the seminar, summarised “be professional, openness,

creating a partnership, teamwork and flexibility are some of the key elements, be in the right place at the right time and, please, service with a smile”.

“I would like to add ‘respect’ to that list”, said Sarah Storie-Pugh of Congrex UK, “we have to accept that in all sectors of the industry we all want the event to be a success; we are all working to that common end goal. Recognising the expertise of others, respecting their view and knowledge, and applying due courtesy will inevitably lead to a more successful event”.