

# KNOCKING AT THE EU DOOR

'WE NEED TO LOBBY THE EU' CAME THE CALL. HOW OFTEN HAVE WE HEARD THAT PHRASE? BUT LOBBYING NEEDS MUCH MORE THAN A RALLYING CRY, IT NEEDS STRUCTURE AND PURPOSE. WHY DO YOU WANT TO LOBBY THE EU AND IF YOU REALLY BELIEVE THAT YOU DO, THEN WHAT? WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO LOBBY THE EU FOR?

This is the basis of any lobbying tactic. Know your goal, your purpose... Is it to make the EU aware of a generalised concept or situation? Is it for specific issues? Is the EU going to be interested in your issues? Or are you just 'flying a kite' to get some PR mileage?

Lobbying is not just attacking a particular government body and throwing ideas, statistics, figures and heartfelt beliefs for a cause, however, worthwhile that cause. It is about building relationships, working closely, understanding each other's points of view and requirements. Relationships which can lead to friendships and close contacts, that is the secret behind successful lobbying.

IAPCO is one of a number of associations which represent the world of meetings and it is no secret that this industry believes in face-to-face meetings, which in itself is a successful lobbying campaign emanating from the Convention Industry Council. We also know that this physical meeting of the minds is also the most effective way to cultivate relationships - and relationship building is the key to success.

IAPCO's relationship with the EU began over 20 years ago, when the interpretation arm of the Commission became active members of the Association, and collaborated (1987) with the translation of the Meetings Industry Terminology - a dictionary of over 900 words translated into (now) 14 languages, but initially just the languages of the EU - because there was a need for the same end product. And so the relationship began...

The EU is a house of many doors. It is important to know on which door to knock. Because of the early relationship, nurtured over the years, when a couple of issues surfaced which IAPCO felt required a 'lobbying' approach, contacts were available to point the way to the right door. And so, with that in mind, IAPCO went knocking on the door of the European Commission.

## GETTING READY TO KNOCK

One of the first considerations, is whether you, as the lobbyist actually have any 'clout', and so, as we walk towards the EC's door, we remind ourselves of IAPCO's presence in Europe - over 3,000 meetings per year and 70% of our membership network comprises European business - a strong entity that needs to understand the governmental influences that drive change and affect our business. The decisions that are taken at the European governmental level can have a tremendous impact on the meetings business. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to invite our industry in, to search for platforms to exchange information and to demonstrate the needs of our industry on the policy makers that serve the majority of our network. We approached the door and were ready to meet with the DG Taxud and the SCIC D1 of the European Commission.

## THE DOOR OPENS

The exchange of hot issues begins. *'Our meeting was extremely fruitful and our exchange of dialogue helped us each understand our positions and challenges,'* says Patrizia Buongiorno, Past President of IAPCO, when a key representation met Pia Michelsen from the DG Taxud and the representative of the SCIC D1 and the event manager of the ETF (European Training Foundation.)

**Hot issue #1: Our friend, VAT.** With the constant changes of VAT regulations, it is difficult for anyone to keep up and we in the event industry are no different. We took the time to describe the impact that changes to VAT regulations have to us and our clients (and our client's clients) and the EC was all ears - keen to provide an EC VAT expert to attend the following IAPCO General Assembly to explain the latest regulations to the IAPCO members. The follow-up to this presence was a personal contact who invited members to make one-to-one approaches on specific VAT issues. In other terms: successful lobbying by a friendly approach.

## Hot issue #2: Our other friend, RFPs.

Each DG of the European Commission has

its own rules and regulations for submitting bids for EU Requests for Proposals. EU RFPs are infamous for being complicated, ever-changing and resulting in a large stack of papers to comprise the final bid. Yet, all in the industry are aware of this and we all trudge forward regardless - desperately trying to understand the nuances of the RFP process. The EC listened intently to our situation and agreed that each DG does in fact have different processes - but they also each have different needs. Very specific issues were brought forward - such as the challenge to include names of team members for long-term multi-year projects when the future is not as foreseeable when it comes to personnel changes. They heard our plight and explained the background as to why they need this information and the manner in which they needed it... not quite such a successful outcome to the lobbying as hot issue #1, but still the contact was made, the

relationship had some foundation, and the door was open.

Lobbying rarely yields immediate results, it's a long-term approach. While the questions to the EC were not all met with specific answers, the first step in the relationship building was a success. The intention should be to build a lasting mutual relationship with the governance body that defines the rules that impact our business.

IAPCO knocked on the door of the EU and it was opened. Step 1 accomplished. Step 2, as with all lobbying, is to better understand the needs of the EC and the regulations that impact upon all of us - and at the same time, to continue to educate the Commission on our industry and its challenges.

We should all be aware that companies that fail are not only the ones that refuse or are

unable to adapt, but those that simply cannot adapt quickly enough to outpace fundamental market trends. Bureaucracy and politics can create barriers for execution which may hinder the adaptability of any organisation in motion - and our industry needs to meet these barriers head-on. Successful lobbying is to create an environment [with the EU] to discuss topics that need special attention because we all have to realise that they have a direct impact in our business.

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*This article was provided by the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers, author Patrizia Semprebene Buongiorno, AIM Group International, Italy. IAPCO represents today more than 114 professional organisers, meeting planners and managers of international and national congresses, conventions and special events from 40 countries. [info@iacpo.org](mailto:info@iacpo.org) / [www.iacpo.org](http://www.iacpo.org)*

