

THE COLLABORATIVE TALENTS OF A DESTINATION

Collaboration, a sense of common purpose and shared leadership are fundamental to the success of attracting international meetings to a destination.



Having worked in the meetings industry and operated globally for many years I have learnt that the collaborative talents of a destination are key to the success of winning a congress bid and in turn successfully implementing the delivery of that congress. If you could compare the MICE market to a computer, the conference product would be the hardware, however, what makes a destination excel is its software which is the collaborative approach it takes to driving the destinations' business tourism strategy. This talent and joint up thinking stems from the coming together of the main stakeholders of that city. Those cities that present a united front from the perspective of venues, hotels, PCOs, DMCs, convention bureaux, tourism agencies, and city officials are often easier in which to work.

RUN LIKE A BUSINESS

Together, they strategically plan the business mix for their city, address key issues to enhance the city as a congress destination, combine their talents, share experiences and knowledge, all with the aim of enhancing the visitor/client experience. When cities are run like a business, they are more efficient, collaborative and competitive. If we consider each stakeholder group as a department in a company, when those departments communicate and share knowledge, the combined talents and experiences will lead to informed decision making and assists in its strategic direction.

The convention bureaux and the trade of a city (venues, hotels, PCOs, DMCs, etc.) are at the cold face

of selling in a global industry. They are in constant contact with prospective and repeat clients, they are close to the needs of end user and have a good understanding of what is on offer in competing cities. One could say that they represent and are champions of the potential client. It can only make sense that the business tourism leaders of a city glean from this knowledge to improve the competitive position of the city. It is through working groups, task forces, business tourism forums and annual conferences in a city that this information is shared and in turn helps form the decision making process and implementation planning for a city. Essentially, when practitioners and policy makers in any industry work together, the combined talents lead to success.

We cannot underestimate the value and the importance of the "ease of doing business" in a city. On a micro level, it is the "people on the ground", the trade of a city, the sales people in venues, hotels, PCOs, DMCs, the convention bureau who influence the decision of the end user. At the core of this group of people, is the neutral party, the convention bureau.



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They represent the destination, they are often the first port of call, and their membership is the talent pool of the destination. It is this network and support mechanism that will ensure the successful delivery of the congress. Like any business, the delivery team must be informed, well trained and experienced and this leads to education.

I believe the city who brings their talent network together, proactively provides an annual education programme with relevant training for each sector of expertise, it's the city who will convert business at a higher ratio, will build an excellent reputation for supporting clients and in turn will deliver successful congresses. When trust and expertise come into play, that client will continue to come back. It is far less expensive and much more efficient to retain the client than find new clients.

MAXIMISING POTENTIAL

If we put the convention bureau at the core of the support network, it is also critical that they do not "go it alone". Like any network, it makes sense to maximise the potential of the talent pool, glean from

the experience of this network, all which in turn gives confidence to the end client that their congress will be supported, their objectives delivered and their delegates will have both an enhanced learning experience and enjoy the city to its full potential.

The support for the client does not end at connecting the client with the talent network and service providers, the PCO and the convention bureaus are also the clients' connect to what I call the Triple Helix: city and government officials, academia representing the knowledge economy of the city and the corporates of the city who will help fund the congress. It is the successful engagement of all three sectors that entices the client to consider the bid and the eventual awarding of a congress.

The city that brands itself to welcome the delegation, the restaurants who put up welcome signs in their windows, the taxi drivers who are aware of the congress and give a warm welcome at the airport, the policy makers who create a relevant legacy programme from the congress, the educators who showcase the knowledge economy of their academic

institutions and finally the corporates and funders who help financially support the congress, is an efficient and experienced destination.

The commitment to collaboration leads to energised engagement, improved vision and opens the eye to opportunity. The collective energy of any industry working in harmony leads to strategies being effectively translated into actionable project plans with clear responsibility. Measurement of success and failure are identified, well-understood, and communicated to all stakeholders. Excitement for the "to be" state easily overcomes the inertia of the status quo. **HQ**



This article was provided by the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers, author Nicola McGrane, Managing Director, Conference Partners, Ireland, and IAPCO Council Member. IAPCO represents today 115 professional organisers, meeting planners and managers of international and national congresses, conventions and special events from 40 countries. info@iapco.org / www.iapco.org