

# FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL THE ASIAN ASSOCIATION MARKET

**Today we hear about Asian powerhouses emerging everywhere. Businesses are being bought and consolidation and rebranding takes place. Even Asian brands emerge more often, HuaWai and Mi are now household brands, MG cars re-emerged being a Chinese owned brand, back from the past. It would seem that Asia is slowly taking its fair share on the global market. But in comparison to this, we see very few societies emerge.**



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There is no doubt that Asian membership and or attendance to western conventions has increased dramatically. Many societies can easily say they have 20-30% Asian attendance at their meeting. The question remains, why is this so? One does not have to look far to find some of the basic reasons why this mostly happy phenomena occurs. For anyone who has attended or spoken at the Asian conferences you will realize the local approach of each meeting. And it is this local approach that is exactly what has held back the globalization. First of all, most Asian societies are not membership focused. They consider membership a privilege and the results are that you

get to be a member and participate in the Annual Meeting. As a Federation you represent your country. And a board does not focus on long-term strategy (except for approving the next meeting hosts) but is there primarily to defend its own territory or country (territory is politically more correct as we have HK and Taiwan as independent members). If you look at the basic constitution of a society in Asia (if they are even registered anywhere formally at all) you will see that the main source of income, the Annual (or Bi-annual) Meeting, is franchised out to the local host for either a % of the profit or % of the revenue. Sadly, often there is no profit reported and therefore Societies remain too poor to have a professionally managed member service and real member values provided. Politically, no board challenges the hosts who "lost money". They generally frown and move on. The second part is presentation value. Asians, as much as everyone else, wants to ensure their papers are presented between the best and at the highest level. This drives many KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders) to ensure their findings are only published in the western meetings.

But is it all gloom and doom? Not really, as markets balance themselves due to supply and demand. The Middle East has seen commercial organizers taking

the lead and being the successful replacement of societies, and they in turn teamed up with global hospital brands and universities to fill the gap of domain knowledge. In SE Asia, a European cancer society created an Asian edition, which took the entire space in just 12 months.

What is interesting is that they transferred their capacity problem into an opportunity. They were outgrowing their meeting in Europe due to massive delegate growth (especially Asians) and decided to invest in an Asian event to offset that pressure, and created a brand-new opportunity in partnership with a global PCO to take care of local logistics and fundraising. Within its first year it had outperformed the Asian counterpart and taken the lead position in its field. One US based industry association had a more extensive challenge as Asians outnumbered Americans 5-1 in their US meeting, with the result of them announcing a second meeting in 2019 in Asia.

But there are some success stories in the making as well. This is mainly with organizations that have consolidated power, therefore foregoing the politics of Asian correctness. These are the few societies that would work with Core PCOs and have a long-term

strategy and a member focus. Revenues are exclusively for the society and therefore it has room to develop. PCOs often take a stake in the event therefore removing the fear of the society of possible losses, and increasing efficiency in spending and seeing revenue growth and consistency in management, something widely appreciated by sponsors.

Recently I was asked to consult with a local Singapore-based (non-medical) association. This organization has become a flagship of the Singapore government due to its ability to move things and find its own funding and niche. This is an association that will have the capability to influence urban development globally because I believe they are getting it right. They sit on a great knowledge base and are ready to invite the world to share in it. They identified e-learning and community building as their tools, to

provide an offering of a free-membership module with a pay-as-you-go structure. But moreover, they have cloud. They have a partnership with a major development organization to educate policy makers, allowing them an in-road into all Asian corners and likely beyond. With e-learning finally becoming somewhat accepted in Asia, they are just the kind of organization we like to see develop into its exclusive domain area of knowledge.

It is therefore more likely we will see some Asian industry associations take a global stage, rather than scientific. But unless the rather competitive Asian culture disappears among the board of directors allowing a regional focus rather than the protection of the national one within a regional framework, it is unlikely we will see many unified long-term strategies emerging that will provide the globalization.

This article was provided by the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers, author MARCEL EWALS, Director of Strategic Development and Associations in Asia for MCI Pacific, with 25 years of developing associations in Asia in many different fields. MCI is an independent, privately held company, with headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland with 64 offices in over 32 countries across Europe, the Americas, Asia-Pacific, India, the Middle East and Africa delivering projects for clients all over the world. IAPCO represents today 116 companies comprised of over 7,500 professional congress organisers, meeting planners and managers of international and national congresses, conventions and special events from 41 countries.

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