

We are **Stronger Together:** Why Businesses **Need Each Other**

In today's fast-paced environment, a 'do-it-alone' approach is not the best strategy for growth. Companies that initially grew organically need to look for new ways to drive collaborative innovation that delivers on what their customers need today and in the future, writes the chairman of **ICOM Group, Ahmed El Shal.**

Collaboration and strategic partnerships are fundamental to improving business outcomes that will benefit everyone: businesses, customers and employees. So, it is essential nowadays for businesses to always be looking after the growth and wellbeing of our customers and sponsors, otherwise we will be losing them for good.

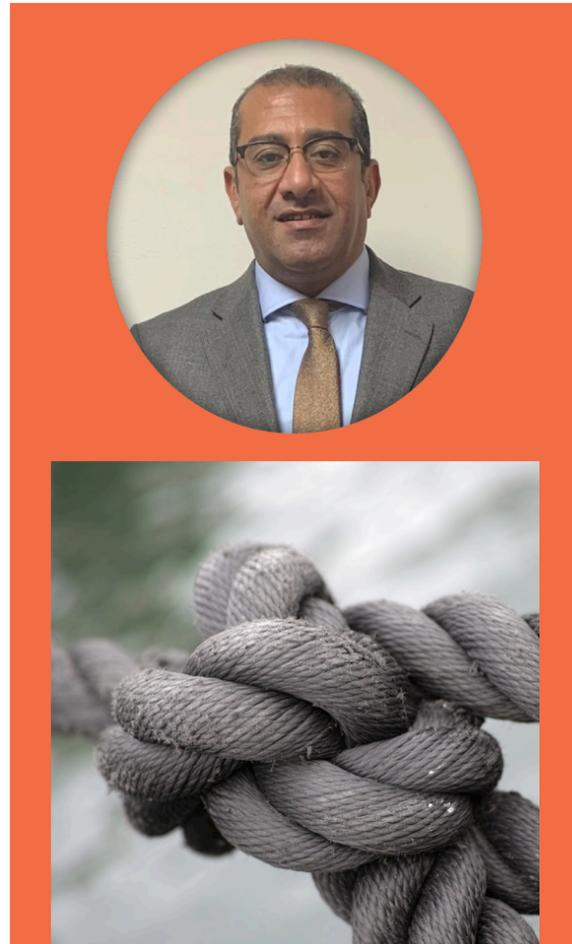
For any PCO to grow in its market, they must be fully aware of their customers' needs and requirements. We have to ask for their ideas on how to offer the most return on investment, listen to their feedback on what strategies have been more (or less) successful from their point of view. We have to be willing to customise events' packages that are based on each company's needs.

During this unprecedented time, countries around the world began a phased reopening of businesses following a months-long period of shutdown, however, large-scale events and conferences are being approached with caution. Events throughout the spring rapidly shifted from in-person to virtual and hybrid – to varying levels of success – and, as we look ahead, it is likely most events for the foreseeable future will continue to be either all virtual or have a strong online component. While the health and safety of attendees may be at the heart of this decision, many associations are also seeing the shift to virtual events as an opportunity to engage with a larger audience in new ways.

While PCOs will never fully replace the live event experience, with thoughtful, strategic planning, they started to integrate innovative ideas into their business plans to support the event's owner to pursue their business goals and maintain a strong bond with their clients. By replacing the live events with the virtual and hybrid templates, many of the same goals can still be met, such as furthering industry education, creating professional connections and networks, and building relationships between people and businesses.

PCOs succeeded to help their exhibitors and sponsors gain visibility and better engagement with their target audience before, during and after the virtual and hybrid event by applying the following initiatives:

1. Offer an opportunity for companies to sponsor specific sessions or educational tracks that are related to their industry and provide them with the needed branding options.
2. Some attendees may experience zoom fatigue after a day of virtual sessions, many more will look forward to the social opportunities that are such an invaluable part of conferences. PCOs started to integrate the idea of a virtual lounge so small groups can gather in between sessions for networking purposes.
3. Allow your sponsors' voices to be heard by sharing their valuable



expertise and knowledge as session speakers.

4. Provide other options for a successful networking between attendees and exhibitors, such as creating an interactive exhibitor directory which should be searchable and easy to navigate, the more information the better: company profiles, website links and supplier contact information are a must.

As an industry leader in Egypt and the Middle East, **ICOM Group** had a proactive engagement plan ready to put into action in order to cope with this challenging time that we are experiencing nowadays.

Our Commercial and Partnership Division, collaborating with the Business Development Division, successfully integrated commercial activities and the resources of sponsors into events and projects' programming. Such to improve the audience experience and help them perceive sponsors as authentic and relevant. Collaborative capabilities include the ability to identify partners with complementary resources and to establish a relationship management infrastructure that facilitates interaction and resource combinations between partners. In turn, this enables the events' committees and associations to identify and handle potential conflicts and to build trust. These capabilities have impact on resource integration and thus the value generated by and for the events and projects organisation.



Several initiatives had been put into action with partners, sponsors and payers; the main focus was to help our partners take part in one-on-one sessions and a slew of activities from anywhere in the world. So we designed some online and hybrid actions that feature pre-recorded and live-stream events, infographics and sessions that partners and sponsors can view the latest debuts at their convenience.

We succeeded in implementing the following:

- **Account-based marketing events.** Highly targeted and customised experiences designed to address specific client's or prospect's needs.
- **Intimate breakfasts, lunches and dinners.** Small events with a focus on networking or thought leadership, either customer- or prospect-focused.
- **Fair to compare meetings.** Focus gathering with each partner or sponsor team with a concise plan of action of chosen future products to show and set out the funding capabilities and benefits in each one.
- **Online collective videos and campaigns.** That create quick awareness, engagement and unite the vision of all MICE leaders and stakeholders during the pandemic time of COVID-19.

Big breakthroughs and progress can't happen in silos. Working collaboratively

with partners – within an organisation as well as within the ecosystem to solve business problems – generates the kind of energy that fuels growth, innovation and creativity. Developing value-aligned partnerships that focus on common goals and complementary strengths is key to ensuring successful outcomes for all.

ICOM was founded in 1998 by Ahmed and Belal El Shal with a vision to serve commercial, professional and medical communities worldwide, by helping them connect and learn, and by providing access to content and intelligence that helps people and businesses work smarter and make better decisions faster.

More info: icomgroup.org

This article was provided by the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers. IAPCO represents today 137 companies from 40 countries, including over 9900 professional congress organisers, meeting planners and managers of international and national congresses, conventions and special events.



 INFO@IAPCO.ORG

 IAPCO.ORG

