

IAPCO Annual Seminar

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTINUING EDUCATION

THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY IS CHANGING, EVOLVING AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT. LIKE ANY OTHER INDUSTRY, IT'S GOT CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME, OPPORTUNITIES TO GRASP, AND MUST RESPOND TO CHANGES IN A VERY COMPETITIVE WORLD. PCOS ARE EVOLVING TOO: FROM LOGISTICS TO CONSULTING, FROM PROMOTING TO MARKETING AND COMMUNICATING, FROM DATA COLLECTING TO DATA MANAGING, AND SO ON, THEY MUST BE QUICK IN ADAPTING. ATTENDING IAPCO ANNUAL SEMINAR IN WOLFSBERG, SWITZERLAND, IN JANUARY WAS, TO ME, AN EYE-OPENER TO THE EVER-CHANGING ROLE OF PCOS IN THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY.

REPORT RÉMI DÉVÉ

IAPCO doesn't really need to be introduced anymore. But for those of you who have been living on a planet far away from the meetings world, it enjoys a world-class reputation as the International Association of Professional Congress Organizers. Like any association, IAPCO dedicates itself to continuing education to make sure the meetings industry doesn't stand at a standstill, shares best practices, and stays competitive. In the specific field of international meetings' management training IAPCO has built up a reputation second to none since the first-ever IAPCO Annual Seminar in 1975. Already.

WHO IS IT

Before I registered, I had been warned that the Seminar would be quite intensive. On this side, I was not disappointed the least. The Seminar is indeed a super-tiring but super-interesting 5-day residential course held at the end of January each year - and it used to last 7 days in the not so distant past! In the meetings industry, it is also known as the 'Wolfsberg Seminar' because for the last 38 years, it has taken place at the Wolfsberg Platform for Executive and Business Development Center, a training centre of the

Union Bank of Switzerland. I'm told over 1,600 people worldwide have obtained an IAPCO Seminar Certificate of Attendance. That number only speaks for itself. Given my relatively new position in the meetings industry, I was worried I was too much of a rookie to attend the Seminar.

Will there only be senior executives looking to brush up their knowledge and learn what they might not have been exposed to yet? Sarah Storie-Pugh, IAPCO's Administrator, was quick to reassure me. She said: *'Anyone involved in the meetings industry is welcome, and the programme benefits those of all levels of knowledge, whether new to the industry or having many years of experience.'*

The Seminar is indeed designed for anybody, experienced or not, employed by professional congress organisation companies, national or international associations, congress centres, travel agencies, congress hotels, convention bureaux, national tourist bodies, corporate meeting planning departments... you name them. My group was a good mix:



some of the more creative students

from professional associations to local PCOs, from Asia to Turkey, from association management companies to venue finders, from Israel to France, it seems like all clients and all suppliers of the industry from every corner of the globe were represented. And while the Seminar is recognised as the most comprehensive course for beginners, it proved, this year again, to be equally challenging and rewarding for those who have been active in the meetings industry for many years.

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THE BID PROJECT

In addition to a bunch of master classes covering pretty much all the topics of interest for those working in the meetings industry - from marketing to communication, from logistics to sponsorship, from data collecting to client management (all variously interesting in my humble opinion) - the main challenge of the seminar was a group project for which we had to work on a bid. Each group was assigned an event to bid for (could be a super large medical conference, could be a small corporate meeting, we ended up with a medium-size financial meeting 'with a lot of accompanying persons, spouses and children') and we had to work on it for a few hours everyday, before we made a



The Faculty and some 'students'

(filmed!) group presentation of it in front of the Faculty, who had the difficult task to appreciate it.

Of course a friendly competition between all the groups quickly took place and when presentation time came, it seems like each and everyone of us went over the top to impress the jury. I personally liked my group tried to incorporate new technology during our speech (we did a QR code as a 'Save the date!' for the event and even came up with a short movie presenting the destination we selected!), which John Martinez of Shocklogic Global on Technology, appreciated too.

I won't tell you at this point if we won or not, I'll just say this bid project was more an opportunity for anyone involved to share their knowledge, to learn how others did things, to find new, creative ideas that would impress potential clients. On that level, the whole thing was a success. And on a side note, one of the key messages I will always remember came from André Vietor, of Viajes Iberia Congresos : *'A bid should be perceived as a destination bid, not a PCO bid. Searching for the added value is also paramount. What is there for the client to 'gain' by coming here or there?'*



The view from the congress centre

One more word on a particular change that took place at the Seminar this year and that proved extremely successful. More than half of the learning time was dedicated to shorter overviews followed by a choice of tutorials where smaller groups, and even one-to-ones, were accommodated. In an industry that is constantly emphasizing the importance of face-to-face meetings, it just made sense.

www.iapco.org

IAPCO's 39th Annual Wolfsberg Seminar will take place on 19-24 January 2013.



Working on a bid

PCOs are becoming co-thinkers

EVERY INDUSTRY HAS ITS CORNERSTONES. IN THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY, PCOS ARE IMPORTANT ONES BECAUSE THEY (CO) SHAPE CONFERENCES. HOW THIS SHAPING HAS CHANGED IN THE COURSE OF TIME IS A FASCINATING STORY. A STORY THAT WAS TOLD IN APRIL IN PARIS DURING IAPCO'S 43RD ANNUAL MEETING, WHERE ISABEL BARDINET, CEO, EUROPEAN SOCIETY OF CARDIOLOGY, IMPRESSED THE AUDIENCE WITH HER KEYNOTE SPEECH "WHAT FUTURE FOR PCO'S?"

REPORT MARCEL A.M. VISSERS

BY THEMSELVES

There was a time when (medical) associations weren't always happy with the input of a PCO in a conference. Following that discontent, some decided to organize conferences by themselves. After the IAPCO Annual Meeting in Paris on this subject, I had a conversation with a former association executive, who has jumped over to the other side of the fence. Luc Hendrickx, who used to work for the International Federation of Diabetes, now works at Kenes: *'I was one of those who, at some point, decided not to work with a PCO anymore. Perhaps it was motivated by the pride of some PCOs who call themselves "untouchable" and pontificated that a conference of some size and professionalism could only be organized by a PCO. IAPCO went a step further: a decent conference could only be properly organized by a IAPCO PCO. That was a bit too much for me.'*

He continued: *'Because of the decision of those pesky associations who thought they could do everything alone, PCOs had to reinvent themselves a little bit. They evolved from masters of congress with full control to servants of congress controlled by the associations. Back then, they were servants of brute logistics, now they are mutating again, into partners and co-thinkers around the concept of the congress, the learning goals and what the participants will finally gain from it. The latter is what Kenes is trying to do.'* You can read more about this subject on www.marcelblog.typepad.com

THE VISION OF THE AIM GROUP

More and more I find that smaller PCO companies or AMCs communicate better and stronger than their larger siblings. The messages are more direct and sometimes illuminating for the customer or prospective customer. They don't only speak about how good and how successful they are, but about how successful a congress can become by thinking together with the client. A good example was the presentation of Patrizia Buongiorno (AIM Group Int. Rome) and Suzanne Kostka (AIM Group Int. Vienna) during the Insight & Networking Evening in Brussels, organized by Glocal Solutions EU HQ.

The subject was *'What does it take to make your event stand out?'* They shared their experiences on how to create a successful event. Both women drew sharp lines (often with humor) by focusing on the five drivers of a meeting at this time. One of the major drivers is the new business model that Suzanne Kostka described as 'taking care' of the event. Listeners not familiar with meetings could learn a lot from both speakers.



Inge Hanser and Isabel Bardinnet

IAPCO 2013 ANNUAL MEETING

The official website for the IAPCO 2013 Annual Meeting and General Assembly has now been launched, and can be found at www.iapco2013.ie.

The conference, which will take place in Dublin on 14-17 February 2013, will be organized by three of Ireland's foremost PCOs, MCI Dublin, Conference Partners and Keynote PCO.

■ Small country with great potential

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