



THE ASSOCIATION
MAGAZINE

Headquarters

AUGUST 2020 #95 BUILDING BRIDGES IN THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY

Interview with
International Live Events
Association (ILEA)

How to Incorporate
Association Brand in your
Next Bid

The Virus is Still Here

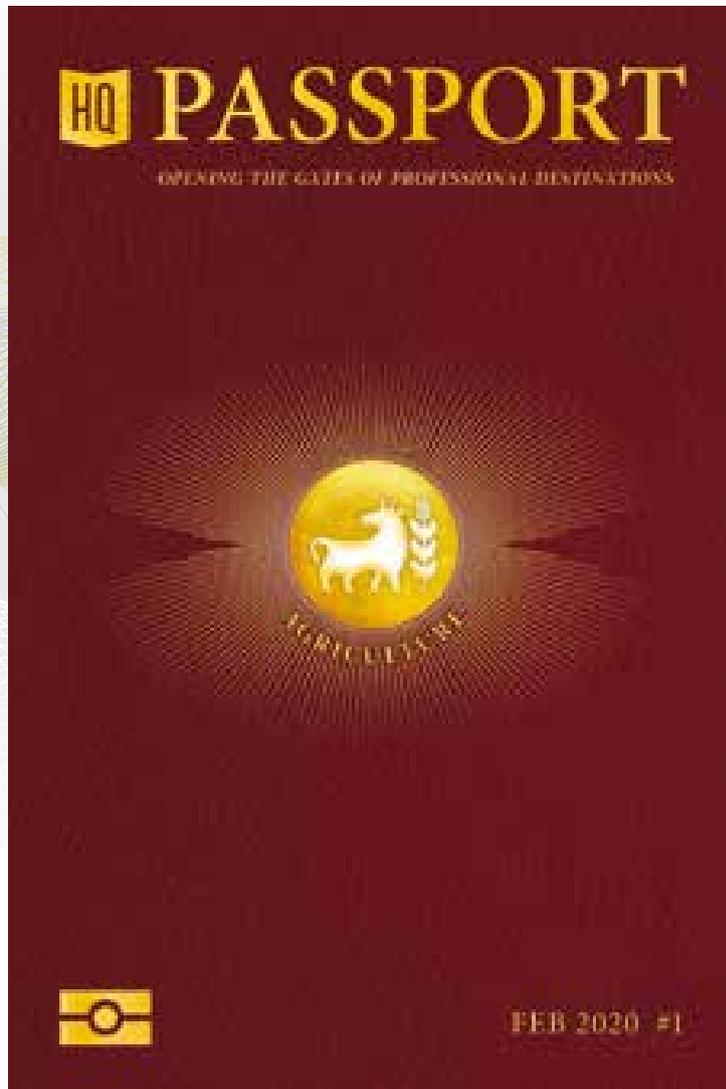
Special Feature:
Aviation Industry's
struggle in Face of the
Coronavirus

(Pag. 18-21)

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Kaohsiung is The Place to be in Asia

Virus is **Still Here**



Staying Relevant by our **Members' Side**



What will Happen to The **Aviation Industry?**

INTERNATIONAL ACCREDITATIONS





The Hounded Meetings Industry

As I wrote before, when the pandemic started, I retreated in my garden for a bit to work quietly and think deeply about a new vision for conferences. It was like the smallest sharpshooter in the world managed to smash up an entire world industry with the smallest bullet. Then, because I wanted to find a way out in my thinking about the future, I left the path of philosophy and went down the path of economy.

The aviation industry, the meetings industry, the catering industry, and the whole world of events have suffered the greatest damage arising from the coronacrisis. What all these industries have in common is that they are at the heart of the experience economy. The virus managed to damage our modern lifestyle at its heart. No more travelling, no more sitting together, no more fully enjoying a destination: that is what the little SARS-CoV-2, like a hobgoblin, has done to us.

In my train of thought, I realised that the experience economy was based on a very strong business model: consumers were willing to pay a premium price for unique, exclusive, tailor-made experiences. As it was, the experience economy had proved to be particularly crisis-proof after the banking crisis of 2008. A conference is a prime example of this economy and shares all of its characteristics.

But that's also why, this time, we are so exceptionally hard-hit. We have landed flat on our backs, nevertheless the ability to do everything digitally will not help us get back on our feet.

What will be the upshot of this?

Traditional conferences will be relegated to the background and associations will have to look for new forms of income. Right now, we can be almost certain that experiences – all kinds of gatherings – will be more private, more exclusive and often more expensive. Perhaps this will herald an evolution towards meaningfulness rather than numbers.

After all, the need for a sense of connection and physical contact has never been greater.





Kaohsiung is **The Place** to be in Asia

The subtropical port city in southern Taiwan is a talented player in the MICE industry and here it shares its recipe for a successful event destination.

▲ Brogent Global Inc. i-Ride Kaohsiung

The charming city of Kaohsiung has successfully won the bidding of the ICCA Congress 2020 and it shouldn't come as a surprise. Since 2016, 13 cities have shown their interests in the RFP. In the first round, eight cities stood out but, after the second round, only Yokohama, Cartagena and Kaohsiung passed through. Finally, Kaohsiung's phenomenal performance lit up the stage at ICCA Congress 2019 setting the scene for next-year's event. The celebrations culminated in members sending 'postcards of the future' to themselves for next year's Congress. With the promising Taiwanese destination eventually winning the competition, after 28 years, ICCA congress returns to the country and the event will be held from the 1st of November to the 3rd. The main theme of the ICCA Congress 2020 is meetings drive transformation, which will be developed through three major parts: young energy, openness and diversity.

As an emerging player in the global business events market, Kaohsiung definitely deserved to win the host of next ICCA Congress. It has all that is needed to

perfectly complete the task. Sitting by the strategic port, the Kaohsiung Exhibition Center (KEC) boasts a bold, wavy architectural design and offers a spatial, fresh, and easygoing atmosphere. Others city's qualities include: high connectivity, accessibility due to a convenient international airport and high speed rail and harbour for cruises in Asia, including a brand new terminal. Moreover: if you are looking into the destination for their events, the Kaohsiung MICE Office is there to help you for free.

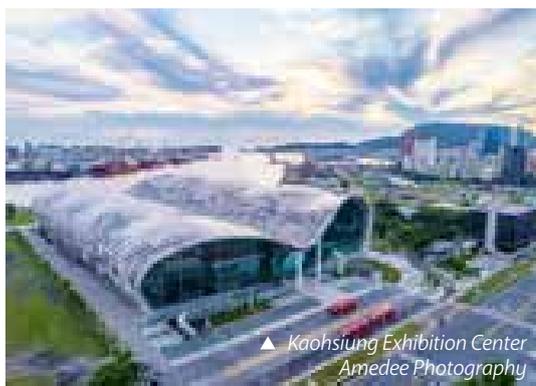
As an international MICE destination in South Taiwan, Kaohsiung has all the comforts to make your next event easy. With advanced infrastructure developments and targeted promotion, it has become a truly modern destination for events of all sizes. Thanks to its smooth and competent organisation and well-established set of offices, Kaohsiung has been very much safe even during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. For instance, the Wind Energy Asia 2020 was a case of a perfectly accomplished event. As a special attention for sustainability makes it certainly future-proof, it will even be held again next year.

And if it's beauty you're looking for, this is the place to be. Kaohsiung is home to several popular astonishing visitor sites, including i-Ride Experience Center, the Lotus Pond, Ten-Drum Ciaotou Creative Park and Fo Guang Shan Buddha Museum. Unique MICE activities can be hosted in the innovative warehouse-style Pier-2 Art Center, besides the National Kaohsiung Center for the Arts, the Confucius Temple, Hongmaogang Cultural Park, the British Consulate Residence (where you can arrive with a cultural cruise from Pier-2 Art Center). Visitors to the city can experience the wilderness of nature and taste the flavors of local cuisine.

Kaohsiung's warm hospitality and enthusiasm, as well as its exclusive MICE strengths, convenient connectivity and wonderful attractions are ready to be discovered by people from everywhere in the world. The year 2020 will be an exciting one for South Taiwan!



▲ Kaohsiung Lotus Pond
Tourism Bureau of Kaohsiung City Government



▲ Kaohsiung Exhibition Center
Amedee Photography

FOR MORE INFO:





IBTM World is **Accelerating Events**

IBTM World is launching a 2020 business mentorship and investment programme. Shane Hannam, portfolio director of IBTM events, believes we will meet again soon and events experts need to be ready.



Shane Hannam

Portfolio Director IBTM Events

“We know things will be a little different this year. We may not be able to greet each other with handshakes and hugs like we normally do. But the most important thing is that we will be there together, as one industry and one community, and we can’t wait to see you.”

These words, part of a message from portfolio director of IBTM events Shane Hannam, are an input for the future and a hopeful invitation to remain strong.

Events are not to be stopped by the pandemic: if anything they are growing. Taking place in Barcelona from the 1st of December to the 3rd of December, IBTM World will be the perfect chance for MICE professionals to get to work.

To make sure of this, IBTM World has just re-launched an investment and mentoring programme for event industry entrepreneurs called ‘Event Business Accelerator’.

Back after a highly successful edition in 2019, it gives people with an idea, product or service related to the events industry the opportunity to participate in an intensive mentoring that culminates in a live pitch for funding to a panel of potential investors at IBTM World. Selected finalists participate in intensive workshops, webinars and one-to-one sessions with a team of industry experts as they develop and scale their ideas and businesses.

This year’s mentors include Richard John, chief operating officer of the specialist events services and training agency Realise;

Giorgia Sanfiori, executive and team coach; Viona Terleth, a business and personal development expert in the international MICE industry; Majbritt Sandberg, a serial entrepreneur; Ingrid Rip, a certified event designer and trainer. The panel who will be judging the live pitches includes Lori Pugh Marcum, co-creator of the IBTM EBA and head of meeting innovation for Meeting Professionals International; David Preston, CEO of Realise; Mark Riches, advisor and NED and SME investor; serial entrepreneur, author and keynote speaker Jason Allen Scott.

Applications for the Event Business Accelerator are now open and will close on the 31st of August. IBTM World is inviting submissions from entrepreneurs with a business that has been in existence for no longer than three years, who have a bright idea for an events business, product or service, or who have up to three years’ experience in running their own business related to the events industry.

ibtm WORLD





The Virus is **Still Here**

Eight months and counting: how much time we've been experiencing the effects of COVID-19 around the world. *HQ's* special report from the MICE industry perspective continues.

"An innate quality of being human is our desire to be inquisitive and to learn, something I have witnessed across the world as ICCA colleagues react to our changing business environments, challenge historical norms and find creative ways to adapt their plans and their organisations," ICCA President James Rees says.

Rees is right. Everything around us is changing now, but so it was before the pandemic started. In fact, it has always been changing. What really matters is how we will react - and what we will learn eventually.

HQ wants to give its readers a sense of hope, together with a realistic image of what is going on. So we interviewed Japan National Tourism Organisation, Russian National Convention Bureau, Tel Aviv's Convention Bureau and a variety of European destinations to see how

reactions differ when it comes to the present challenges. We analysed the consequences of groundings on aviation, collected data and asked ourselves whether the future must be green to exist at all (the answer is yes).

The Economist says COVID-19 had a devastating impact on travelling. "Tourism will become increasingly localised and complicated. But this won't just affect foreign holidays; it could disrupt the workings of the globalised world."

All in all, uncertainty surrounds us. COVID-19 vaccines and treatments are being studied, however new viruses may appear soon. As we continue to erode natural habitats, the likelihood of other diseases emerging are high. In that case, regular periods of confinement could become the norm.

On the other hand, two things we know for sure. The first is that the virus is still there. The second is that people in the association world will still need to meet.

Can MICE professionals find their way in a world of virtual meetings? Even better: can they help prevent this scenario by becoming more sustainable?

According to the Events Industry Alliance (EIA), about 30,000 jobs are at risk among Britain's event organisers, venues and suppliers.

Looking for the answers is our goal. So, although it may feel like 2020 has been a waste of time so far, this may be the most precious opportunity we ever had to create something wonderfully new and save people's jobs.





No **ME**etings without Br**US**sels!

‘No Br__sels without us’ is the phrase that is filling the streets of the Belgian capital these days. It embodies a sense of belonging after months of confinement for its residents, as they want to share their stories and rediscover all the corners and secrets that make this city one of the most iconic in Europe.



The motto is the result of a series of measures by the Regional Government of Brussels to support the sectors of tourism and culture in the resumption of their activities, which resulted in a new marketing campaign. “The tourism, events and cultural sector are vital for our Region,” the minister-president of the Brussels-Capital Region Rudi Vervoort warned. While they are the source of many direct and indirect jobs and undeniably contribute to the international reach of Brussels, tourism, events and cultural operators are going through an unprecedented crisis.”

In the most cosmopolitan city in Europe and the second most cosmopolitan city in the world with its 183 nationalities, **visit.brussels** aimed to highlight the human power that brings together *les bruxellois* with people from all over the world. The message is that there are no Br(US)sels without them...without US.

“This campaign addresses progressively the local, neighbouring and wider markets. Our first aim is to raise awareness of all the possibilities existing in Brussels, the safety of the destination and to enhance the link between the residents and tourism opportunities,” said **Elisabeth Van Ingelgem**, director of the convention and association Bureau at visit.brussels.

In fact, for local tourism, MICE continues to grow in importance. Over the last 10 years, the number of overnight stays for business travel has increased by an average of 4.6% per year. In addition, museums and

attractions welcomed more than 5 million visitors in 2019. “For meetings, our goal is to work towards the last months of the year and take 2021 as a relaunch period, thanks to professional meetings of all kinds,” Van Ingelgem added.

Apart from the impact triggered by conventions and events, it is important to remember the central role that Brussels also plays in the world of international associations. Brussels ranks first in terms of seats of associations and this number is steadily growing, with around 14,000 direct jobs.

Asked about the mobilisation and structural resistance of this ecosystem, Van Ingelgem did not hold back with words of encouragement: “We have seen a very good degree of mobilisation among associations wishing to provide expertise in their fields but also to the large public. On our side, we have also kept all our resources with a new dedicated information website, consultation forms, liaison with all our partners and also echoed associations concerns to our regional authorities and EU discussions.”

Association activities in Brussels, whether based locally or imported by meetings, are essential for the local network and community. Therefore, visit.brussels has immediately acted by delivering information, guidance and creating a specific international associations layer for the recovery plan and overall strategy. Van Ingelgem added: “We have also created a new monthly meeting to update associations on

the situation in Brussels – the Association Midweek Talk – and we have also listed the key needs for an exhaustive FAQ and for the training offers that visit.brussels shall be enhancing towards all sectors.”

Many associations, however, will be obliged to review their existing membership, financial or governance model. “History shows us that associations are a species that is able to survive and evolve with time,” Van Ingelgem said. “Therefore, we keep strong views about not only their future activities, but also in their own engagement in the recovery process.”

Finally, visit.brussels launched a support fund for congresses, meetings and B2B events open to various event planners that you can find on its website. The message is clear: Brussels is the ideal place to run your organisation.



FOR MORE INFO:





Meetings in Tel Aviv are **Here to Stay**

A city built on layers of history and grounded on a privileged position in the Middle East, especially as a global headquarters for events, Tel Aviv-Yafo lives up to the nickname of 'startup city' that never sleeps.



▲ Eurovision 2019 at EXPO Tel Aviv
Photo credit: Ralph Larmann

Designed as a hymn to modernity in the Mediterranean, Tel Aviv boasts more technological startups per capita than any other city in the world and has the highest density of accelerators, making it a global hub of innovation, technology and knowledge-based economies.

No wonder then that the pandemic crisis experienced in 2020 is affecting the business trends of this new and thriving actor in the destination market. The Israeli government has restricted gatherings at event halls, houses of worship, bars, and outdoor events to up to 50 people, and at theatres and cultural halls to up to 250 people. Indoor gatherings have been limited to 20 people.

“COVID-19 has caught everyone off-guard, as no one could have predicted this,” the head of the Tel Aviv Convention Bureau **Noa Sapir** told *HQ*. “Israel was one of the first non-Asian countries to react with border and travel restrictions and to put in place physical distancing measures that

allowed us to control the outbreak of COVID-19 in the city. We’ve also activated a ‘purple badge’ that includes instructions for businesses and hotels about how to reopen to the public.”

Under the umbrella of a very young convention bureau, the city has largely invested in its network. “The Israeli industry will be focusing more on local businesses in the coming months, with international events already planned for 2021. We foresee that the real recovery is only expected in the second quarter of 2021”, Sapir concluded.

Hosting an average of 2.5 million visitors and hundreds of exhibitions, conferences and events each year, Expo Tel Aviv International Convention Centre is the cornerstone for the city’s major events and a historical symbol for the industry.

“It is difficult to predict what will happen but since conferences and exhibitions are events that require planning and production time, it is likely that also in the upcoming

months there won’t be activity in the magnitude we are accustomed to,” confirmed **Iris Mazel**, Expo’s CMO. “We tried, in this exceptional situation, to assist as much as we can to all kinds of social organisations by offering our pavilions (service of the Ministry of Health) to various non-profits organisations for the establishment of food packaging and distribution centres.” Despite the new advent of virtual meetings, Mazel believes that physical meetings have no substitute.

Right now, there are over 100 Israeli companies harnessing technology to combat the coronavirus disease. **CoronaTech Israel** is a new web portal that explores coronavirus-related innovation providing accurate information about local and worldwide opportunities and challenges fronting our collective life. As they are proud to say, they “we look 3-5 years in the future, as the majority of our business is now focused on 2023 and onwards.” Count on Tel Aviv-Yafo for the future. The destination is waiting for you!



▲ Old Jaffa
Photo credit: Guy Yechiely



Russia is Opening Boundaries up

One only needs to rotate a globe to realise the reach and size of Russia. Incorporating a wide range of lands and features, this Eurasian giant offers many opportunities for business events.

▲ Ekaterinburg Eltsin centre



Alexey Kalachev
Director of RCB

Russia is a huge country and each of its regions is unique. Most of these destinations differ in geography, experience among foreign organisers, industry specialisation, cultural and ethnic aspects. Taking into account this diversity, a regional approach has always been used within its international marketing strategy. With COVID-19, business has slowed down and **Alexey Kalachev**, director of the Russian Convention Bureau (RCB), confirmed that: “conferences and exhibitions are included in the list of the most affected industries in Russia and companies are receiving support from the state.”

RCB, together with key industry players, is taking steps to support the MICE industry and remove the stress component of the coronavirus outbreak. “The main thing that we realised from the very beginning, is that we need to quickly unite and look for new solutions to support and further develop companies,” Alexey added. Representatives of the Russian event market jointly came up with initiatives to normalise the situation, by paying attention to the fact that MICE activities are one of the most effective tools to improve any other industrial sector. So how important is this regional composition for business events now? “This is our strength, but also the complexity of promoting all destinations. In 2019, with the participation of foreign experts, we created a new marketing strategy to promote Russia on the international event market,” Alexey said. “The main goal was to determine key directions for international associations and a more effective promotion of various regions in the country.”

The **R&C Market Research Company**, in cooperation with RCB and some major industry associations conducted a marketing study into the impact of the coronavirus. They noticed that, “in the event of the restrictions being extended for a long period of time, the losses by the

industry may exceed 1,6 billion dollars while the number of jobs is to be cut by 50%.” According to the study, it would take at least six months for the industry to recover and, despite the gradual lifting of restrictions, the event industry will probably be the last one to return offline.

On the major challenges and goals for RCB’s position in 2021, Alexey is sure: “Now we clearly understand what to focus on when working with international associations and further actions with event organisers. Russia will need to promote its brand actively, using all the tools available on the external and internal markets.” The bureau wants to create a network of regions to increase Russian’s market share, along the slogan ‘Russia Open to the World’. Truly, Russia took the 35th position in the international rating of ICCA in 2019, up from 2018’s 42th. And make no mistake: they are hungry for more.



▲ St. Petersburg



Safety and Leadership to Reboot Events

There are multiple ways in which Japan can inspire you for an event. If we combine the country's capacity to generate value in research, technology and business, we quickly realise the benefits provided to business events... and the constraints caused by this COVID-19 pandemic.

▲ Old-style bar street

Japan's unique culture offers internationally recognised hospitality and a spectacular fusion of tradition and modernity, which gives this archipelago a great deal of experience in hosting international conferences and professional meetings.

From an early stage, the **Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO)** shared with travellers the most recent news about entry conditions, cancellations of events and closure of venues. As the spread continued in some areas of the country, the government took unprecedented actions, such as the closing of schools, entry bans, and, finally, the declaration of a state of emergency. "As we are close to China, we faced the risks of the epidemic some time before Europe. Sanitary safety controls were strengthened, as well as hygiene measures. A cluster-based approach helped to contain the spread of the virus." **Aurélien Bandini**, European MICE Manager from JNTO, told us.

To prevent the creation of new risk groups, people were also asked to avoid what they called the three "Cs": closed spaces,

crowded places, and close-contact points. Through these measures, local authorities called on citizens to reduce travel to the strict minimum and some businesses to close. Entry bans, caused a historical plunge by 99.9% of monthly foreign visitors in April and March.

Logically, no one expected this avalanche as evidenced by the marketing campaign, «Your Japan, Your 2020, Your Events». "The recent events made it clear that we need to find the best way to readapt our strategy. Our current approach is to push for postponing rather than cancelling events and to stay in contact with our association partners. At this uncertain stage, we cannot set a clear goal, but mitigation of the damage is our top priority", Aurélien acknowledged.

The campaign will be upheld until the end of the year and they are also considering continuing it in 2021. Furthermore, many festivals and major events were called off or postponed in Japan with special emphasis for this year's Summer Olympics. According to a recent JNTO survey, 71.4%

of Conference Ambassadors said they had been impacted by the COVID-19. Among them, 62.5% said the conference was postponed, and 35% were cancelled.

"There is a stronger emphasis on going digital and increasing skills while Japan's MICE industry goes through this crisis," he added. "Regarding the postponement of the Tokyo Olympics, economic studies estimate that it will cost Japan about 6 billion USD, along with other events that need to be rescheduled as a result." But why choose Japan during the recovery while flattening the curve?

"JNTO is maintaining the support policies established at national level, working closely with all the main players of the Japanese MICE industry to set up guidelines that will make events as safe as possible from sanitary risks", Aurélien concluded.

To sum up, they are confident that Japan will remain a top destination in Asia Pacific.



European Cities **do not Bend**

In Europe, which still holds the largest share of regional charts by number of meetings, there were several cities that promptly went to work to contain the damage caused by COVID-19. European Cities Marketing, the association for Tourist Boards and Convention Bureaux representing many of them, wants to keep the conversation afloat with a continuity checklist for sustainable recovery and a new initiative, called 'A New Tomorrow'. We went to talk to four of its member-cities:

1. How is your city containing this whole situation in order to get back on track?

2. What will be your top priority when resuming activities?

3. How do you see the future of events in your city after this pandemic?

NUREMBERG CONVENTION AND TOURIST OFFICE

BY THE CEO, *YVONNE COULIN*

1 Right after the lockdown started, we began to reset our whole marketing planning and to think of a recovery campaign. A new page on our website with the title 'All together' has shown some special online offers of local shops, restaurants and hotels, while a special video with the title 'Nuremberg misses you' was created to generate a positive message for travellers after the coronavirus pandemic. Since then, we continuously worked on a recovery campaign under the motto 'Your time out at home', aiming to attract visitors from Germany, Austria and Switzerland. We also implemented different online meetings with our members to let them know about the latest developments in terms of regulations and governmental financial support.

2 We will focus our recovery campaign primarily on the national market and other markets like Switzerland and Austria, where a quick recovery is to be expected soon. We are also in touch with our partners, hotels and event locations, to check their concepts for future events. For next fall, we are planning a local PR campaign to promote Nuremberg as a destination

for meetings and events. Our aim is to stress out that local partners are perfectly prepared for new formats and meetings under the Coronavirus conditions.

3 There will be a big shift in the format. Face-to-face events are going to resume, but hybrid events are going to be the 'new normal'. As a combination of traditional onsite and online elements, these new events are an opportunity for us to generate a higher reach and thus to gain new target groups. Nevertheless, the content marketing of our clusters will remain important for us. For years, we already have had a close partnership with our stakeholders and established an expertise for our customers. Based on this, we will be able to adapt to the new normal, integrate new formats and provide specific solutions for event organisers.



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DUBLIN CONVENTION BUREAU

BY THE MANAGER AT DUBLIN CONVENTION BUREAU, *SAM JOHNSTON*



1 When the crisis struck, we set out a three-stage process to help and support our industry. The first was ‘Shutdown’ and involved direct engagement with our industry ascertaining the impact it was having on the businesses and the individuals employed by them. The second stage was ‘Survival and Prepare’ and focused on helping our industry and its employees with a further range of support (for instance, one was targeted on the employee and their mental health and wellbeing). The final stage was ‘Planning for Recovery’ and aimed at stimulating demand and supporting industry to convert that. At present, we only have a domestic leisure market but we still work on some enquiries for future conferences and meetings. The Destination Continuity Checklist developed by ECM has been adapted to Ireland and each local task force is using it as a blueprint for actions.

2 As we resume activity and reopen, our focus is supporting our industry and ensuring that as many as possible survive this crisis. In fact, without

any of them our product is weakened when we welcome international events and visitors back to our shores. Our Dublin taskforce group is looking at six specific topics as a priority to support businesses: public realm and mobility; destination marketing; sales and marketing with industry activation; night-time economy and festivals; capital investment; international visitors and business events. When the virus took hold across Europe, we were about to finish a piece of work for ‘Meet in Ireland’ on carbon offsetting that developed into a wider look at our actions and opportunities around sustainability across our industry.

3 The positive side is that we are still bidding on new business and still winning it for future years in addition to the strong pipeline we already have. We are very confident that we can deliver safe events and that we have the wider experience needed by our clients and their attendees. We still have international events on books for later this year but, honestly, they are very unlikely to take place. Beyond that, we hope to welcome new events

early in 2021. Talking to our industry partners and listening to other thought leaders, we think that around 2022 we will begin to get back to levels of international business events as witnessed in recent years. We are ready. We have plans and structures in place, including an increase in our activities to generate more opportunities. Key elements of that planning are the development of our programme around association conferences, the support we offer to them directly, and crucially how we can help build legacy from their events.

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GIRONA CITY CONVENTION BUREAU & PALAU DE CONGRESSOS

BY THE DIRECTOR OF CONVENTION BUREAU, *NÚRIA PRATS ALCÓN* AND THE SALES MANAGER, *MARTA GONZALEZ*

1 Some of the measures adopted by the city of Girona are the widening of the sidewalks, so that pedestrians do not break the safety distance, as well as the facilitating of the authorisations to extend the space of terraces, restaurants and cafes. For the ‘Palau de Congressos’, this new phase implies that the public must take the necessary measures to avoid exposure to the virus and avoid

risks of spreading it. People must adopt some basic measures for individual and collective protection like frequent hand washing, mask wearing, use of outdoor spaces, cleaning and social distance.

2 At the Palau de Congressos, we work to ensure that all policies and procedures to provide safety of delegates are up to date. The well-being of attendees and

our team is our top priority. To do this, we have taken some security measures like disinfection, maintenance, new counting systems to keep the inflow of visitors, and delimitation of meeting spaces. It will be mandatory to use a mask and the public is recommended to bring credentials in e-format. Restaurants and catering will adapt accordingly and only food and beverages for individual use



will be provided. One of the first hybrid events that has taken place at the Palau de Congressos was a projection of the documentary *Kayak no limit*, with both public and virtual attendees able to interact with each other.

3 We organised a Hybrid Day when we intend to discuss the new scenario of the MICE sector and answer the uncertainties that may arise about events in this new situation. From the point of view of associations, there are still doubts about which new formats will be adopted, what new technology elements will be established and how the cities are prepared to receive them. Thanks to technological tools like

the virtual 3D platform, each attendee can create an avatar to be present at the event, as well as joining different scientific presentations or even a commercial exhibition that would allow a high degree of interaction. Certainly, this type of format seems to have come to stay. While waiting for a new normal, it is clear that we'll have to keep training with new technological means and adapting to a new reality.

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CONVENTION BUREAU GENOVA AND CITY COUNCIL

BY THE PRESIDENT, *CARLA SIBILLA* AND THE COUNCILLOR FOR TOURISM AND MARKETING OF THE CITY OF GENOVA, *LAURA GAGGERO*

1 Sibilla: One of the main developments in Genoa is undoubtedly related to the meeting industry. Reaching 3,700 events in 2019, the sector has shown concrete signs of growth throughout the years. Last year total participants were approximately 580,000, with an yearly increase of 15%, not to mention the average expense per participant of about €120 per day for a national event and about €300 euros for an international one.

Gaggero: The tourism system in Genoa is in motion, as we are re-launching the sector and our territory in the second phase of the pandemic. The goal is to promote Genoa as a safe and high quality destination. The city has created a joint working group between local institutions and MICE operators in order to create a shared strategy.

2 Sibilla: The efforts of the city and the Convention Bureau is to make the big congresses, scheduled between September and December, viable. CBG's members include about 40 different companies, from the convention centre to the hotels, from the transport

sector to catering, each with its own challenges. But the congress sector is extremely structured and Genoa can count on a winning territorial system, well-run, with an interdependent system of operators, able to accommodate a single congress in more than one venue or hotel.

Gaggero: Furthermore, the municipality of Genoa has invested significant resources in projects of digital innovation, with particular reference to the meetings and events industry: a digital promotion platform for the MICE sector is currently being developed and an online platform with a city card will be launched this Summer.

3 Sibilla: A hybrid formula that combines a traditional meeting among the participants with an exchange of relationships on the web: this is the post COVID-19 conference, which Genoa can start applying already next fall with some important congresses. It's a diffused distribution among various centres, a formula often already adopted in Genoa and that is fundamental in order to guarantee safety.

Gaggero: The Councillor for Tourism and CBG have been working together to ensure an effective restart of the sector and, thanks to the work done behind the scenes, we can now say that our meetings industry is ready to welcome congresses.



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“We managed to show our customers **alternatives to multi-lingual physical events**”



HQ interviewed Richard Roocroft, director of global sales at Interprefy.

Interprefy is a cloud-based remote simultaneous interpretation platform that enables interpreters to work from anywhere in the world and event participants to use a small app on their smartphones. It was born out of the realisation that simultaneous and conference interpreting hasn't changed much since 1945. This led Kim Ludvigsen to founding the company in 2014 in Zurich, Switzerland, with a mission to remove language barriers through the use of technology. Today a team of over 70 with a strong network of partners works remotely in various countries across the world, helping clients to scale their events and access diverse audiences.

What makes Interprefy special?

As we are pioneers of remote simultaneous interpretation (RSI), aside from upholding the values of Swiss quality and security, our clients largely benefit from our deep knowledge of the interpreting and conferencing industry, and our proven capability of organising and operating large online and hybrid events. We're the only RSI provider that offers extensive event support both before and during the event.

Who are your users?

We've helped hundreds of organisations of all shapes and sizes make their events multilingual and engaging, from SMEs to the largest corporations and intergovernmental organisations in the world. With a platform fit for any type and size of event, it's our mission to make RSI a service available for everybody: SMEs, associations and even NGOs. Anytime, anywhere.

How did the pandemic change your business?

Our business was heavily focussed on in-person events, so the pandemic hit us hard in the first quarter of 2020, like it

did with the entire events industry. That being said, every cloud has a silver lining. In fact, we were taking events online anyway to power the remote interpretation and nowadays we find the source already online and remote interpreting is the only way to make such events multilingual. Technically speaking, nothing has changed internally, however the pandemic has accelerated our business growth and we have formed many strategic relationships in much shorter periods of time as a result.

What main challenges have you faced and how have you overcome those?

When the global lockdown started, our business pretty much broke away overnight because hundreds of planned events got cancelled. But, as the rest of the industry pivoted to online, we managed to show our customers alternatives to physical events and were ready to take their multi-lingual events online with Interprefy Connect PRO or helping to remove language barriers with one of our valued platform partners. Now we're literally overrun with an unprecedented amount of events.

What are your plans for the future?

Interprefy is known to be the international standard for RSI, we're continuously building valuable partnerships with online events technology providers and language partners around the globe, as well as extending our own platform feature capabilities. The development roadmap we have is very exciting and there will definitely be some major announcements coming this year.



interprefy

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Staying Relevant by our Members' Side

Digitalisation, relevance, resilience, recovery: during these unprecedented times, it is the association's imperative to stay by its members' side, adapting its strategy and being flexible. Since the beginning of the pandemic and the postponement of the ECM conference, the network of 120+ European DMOs and CVBs, deployed full energy for its members with new digital initiatives and crucial support.

When hard times come, associations must respond to their members' needs. Climate change, the need for sustainability, society transformation, unprecedented health crises, industry development, economic progress: we constantly need answers and tools to face our dynamic reality.

If there is one thing the COVID-19 crisis taught us about, it is the need and the benefits of improving digitalisation. In only three months, webinars, digital interviews, interactive online platforms have spread all over the world in all kinds of fields. In the meetings industry, we have seen digital conventions being organised, virtual conferences broadcast, keynote speakers talking from their living-room or digital courses on free-access: suddenly something very natural has been added to this, sometimes too conventional-world.

At ECM, after the spread of the crisis, we immediately felt the need and the duty to be by our members' side even when apart, supporting them and offering them new digital communication content through our latest initiative #aNewTomorrow. Our aim? Helping our members to keep on preparing a 'new tomorrow' for DMMOs and adapting our strategy (2019-2022) 'Tomorrow Today', and our brand. What is unique about ECM is actually this capacity to stay agile and tailor the association according to our members' needs: ECM is made by DMMOs for DMMOs and this is our strength.

The purpose of the #aNewTomorrow initiative is to share ideas and challenges,

and find inspiration in new practices and different approaches. How? Thanks to webinars, articles, collaborative dashboards, Zoom conversations and discussion groups, our COVID-19 resource centre forms a critical part of the capability and the potential of the association. In less than a month, we built an entire panel of digital communications with Group NAO.

We started with a discussion group and a collaborative platform in order to collect all available information together and achieve mutual knowledge on the COVID-19 crisis situation in our industry. Then, we launched our webinars series, offering our members insights on strategies for a sustainable recovery, tourism stigma, etc.

Our members' response was really positive and we decided to push our analysis forward. Thus, we published, in collaboration with TOPOSOPHY, The DMMO COVID-19 Continuity Checklist – An ECM Guide for Sustainable Recovery, a relevant and lucid tool for DMMOs in this unprecedented time to face new challenges. The purpose of this paper is to share insights that will help our colleagues, local entrepreneurs, political decision makers, visitors and local communities.

“This practical and pertinent tool for a sustainable recovery is presented in three stages: Response, Recovery and Resilience,” Petra Stušek, ECM president, declared. “While keeping the dialogue, we want together as DMMOs to make the right decisions and learn from the experience of others. The Checklist spans an extensive period precisely because the process of

recovery is expected to be long, uneven and unpredictable.”

Today, we're still far from achieving a new normal reality and we want to continue empowering the conversation with our members on future challenges. With the aim to share knowledge and support each other, we have launched the Long Thinkers Panel as part of ECM #aNewTomorrow initiative. We identified some of the most experienced and bravest thinkers in their fields to decode what is happening now, what happened before and what might happen next. We are inviting each of the Long Thinkers to share their thoughts on specific topics such as innovation and marketing strategies during recovery, travel influencers' key role during the crisis, tourism innovation, etc. Each of them is sharing their perspective on the long-term impact and how we can imagine the future of tourism.

For instance, we recently published an article on 'The Future of the Experience Economy', written for ECM by B. Joseph Pine II, co-founder of Strategic Horizons LLP and co-author of The Experience Economy: Competing for Customer Time, Attention, and Money. In this article, Pine explains that there will be a new tomorrow for the experience economy through transformation, digitalisation and experience platforms. Destinations have to change their perspective and transform their strategy in order to be relevant and attractive.



SUMMER SCHOOL
EUROPEAN CITIES MARKETING

24th > 26th
AUGUST 2020

#ECMSS2020

Following ECM General Assemblies on June 10, our members decided to adapt our strategy to the current situation approving a precise strategic action plan based on eight steps:

- 1. AGENDA SETTING:** conferences calendar, trend observatory, strategy forum
- 2. ECM CO-LABS:** new thematic knowledge groups, new syndicated studies, #aNewTomorrow future content
- 3. OPEN SOURCE PLATFORM:** Summer School 2.0, communication strategy, improving of online discussions
- 4. ADVOCACY:** strengthening relations with EU
- 5. RE-SCOPE:** adapting partnerships, knowledge and resources beyond tourism according to the crisis, prepare 'after tomorrow'
- 6. RE-BRAND:** ECM rebranding in 2020-21 while making sure that ECM by name and fame is clearly identified in the global visitor economy
- 7. RECRUIT:** inviting non-European cities to join our process to recovery together
- 8. RECHARGE:** still strengthening #aNew-Tomorrow initiative

ECM also proposes to bring the industry

closer in those challenging times by giving advanced professionals the opportunity to interact on a more strategic level through a revisited version of the ECM Summer School, virtually, on August 24-26. This ECM Summer School 2.0 is a sort of executive dialogue for experienced professionals of the industry working in convention bureaux, hotels, PCOs, DMCs, airlines, conference venues, congress centres, convention centres, exhibition centres, suppliers of ancillary and other products.

Spread onto three days, sessions of two hours will be provided to discuss the unprecedented situation we are currently living in. After focused presentations and perspectives, our experts will dive deeper into their field of expertise during a live discussion. The three sessions will be dedicated to strategic outlooks for the meetings industry, understanding the world of clients and suppliers, and moving towards a smart recovery. Through presentations, panel discussions and breakout conversations, the participants will have the unique opportunity to exchange knowledge and converse with the faculty members and their fellow European peers during breakout sessions.

In conclusion, once again, ECM reveals itself to be relevant and to be a great help for its members and an essential source of information for the industry. #WeAreECM

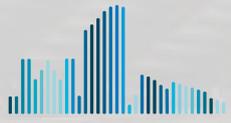
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EUROPEAN CITIES MARKETING
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What Will Happen to the Aviation Industry?

As almost nobody was allowed to fly for months due to COVID-19, the business of airlines is suffering and may find any recovery very difficult. But this can also be an opportunity for change.

Emanuela Barbiroglio reports

The impact of COVID-19 on international passenger traffic during the first six months of this year resulted in an overall reduction of 47 to 58% of seats compared to baseline. If the current-level of contraction continues to September 2020, airlines could lose up to \$40 billion gross operating revenues every month in the summer travel peak season - according to a recent report by the UN specialized agency International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). It highlights that the biggest overall impact is expected in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region, followed by North America and the Middle East. Not only international, but also domestic air transport has been impacted significantly.

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) projected 2020 global revenue losses for the passenger business of between \$63 billion (in a scenario where COVID-19 is contained in current markets with over 100 cases as of March 2) and \$113 billion (in a scenario with a broader spreading of COVID-19).

Data from the The International Monetary Fund (IMF) shows that the global economy is projected to contract sharply by -3% in 2020, assuming that the pandemic fades in the second half of 2020 and containment

efforts can be gradually unwound.

Airports may lose approximately \$76 billion for the entire year, as estimated by Airports Council International (ACI).

Now, what would these figures mean for airlines?

Some have already collapsed, many are currently downsizing their operations and eventually may not be able to survive anyway. *Forbes* reported that “without financial aid from their governments, half of the world’s approximately 800 airlines could be bankrupt by the end of May because of the unprecedentedly swift and deep drop in air travel demand amid the coronavirus pandemic, a decline that has exceeded the fright-driven falloff that followed the 9/11 terrorist attacks.”

The personnel of low-cost carriers may be particularly affected, as well as customers who are not seeing their refunds. Some believe it will be the end of an era, with such companies disappearing.

On the other hand, this could be the chance to rethink travelling entirely and attach green strings to bailouts. Climate campaigners, at least, think so.

For instance, the network ‘Stay Grounded’, fostering alternatives to aviation as a tool for climate action, has just launched the #SavePeopleNotPlanes petition with more than 300 organizations and 300 scientists around the world backing the call. “Bailouts must not allow the aviation sector to return to business as usual after COVID-19 has been defeated,” the text reads. More than 64,000 people are demanding that workers and the climate are put first.

In fact, the recovery may even worsen global warming. While airlines’ emissions have been falling this year due to groundings, they are expected to bounce back unless airlines are required to commit to meaningful emissions reductions. Also, passenger numbers have repeatedly broken records in the aftermath of global shocks such as the 2008 financial crisis.

According to the European airline bailout tracker compiled by Carbon Market Watch, Greenpeace and Transport & Environment, airlines are now seeking more than €26 billion. While governments have agreed €11.5 billion in financial aid and a further €14.6 billion is under discussion, none come with binding environmental conditions for airlines to clean up their act.

Gilles Dufrasne, policy officer at Carbon Market Watch, said: “We must avoid a social catastrophe, but blank cheque bailouts to airlines are not the solution. They will simply put the sector back on its totally unsustainable growth path. Any bailouts must be just, both socially and environmentally.”

On April 15, the European Commission and Council adopted the “Joint European Roadmap towards lifting COVID-19 containment measures”, which was welcomed by the association Airlines for Europe (A4E).

In a statement, they said: “Our common goal must be to restore affordable air connectivity in Europe as soon as possible. To achieve this, we need proportionate, sensible and effective measures which are coordinated at EU level.”

And yet, according to A4E, aviation taxes - created to offset carbon emissions - will take away money airlines need to invest in future sustainability initiatives.

Similarly, the director general and CEO of the International Air Transport Association (IATA), Alexandre de Juniac, recently called upon the EU member states “to ensure that a harmonized approach to reimbursements and vouchers during COVID-19 is achieved through a temporary and clearly drafted adjustment of the current passenger rights framework.”

“If the airlines run out of cash people will lose their jobs, airlines could fail and there would be negative fallout across the travel and tourism value chain,” De Juniac added. “There is no public policy benefit in that. Airlines drive business and link economies. Re-starting economies with an even more hobbled air transport sector is akin to boxing in the fight of a lifetime with one hand tied behind your back.”

In these difficult times, global collaboration could be the way forward. “The challenges ahead of us as an industry are multiple and I think it will be about those who can adapt and create new ways forward,” says Jay Martens, co-founder and managing director of the ‘atelier de creations’ FANBU. “What Covid has done is shaking all industries and

we are all looking at solutions but there is no perfect one. Most companies at the moment are fighting to survive and this will really reshape the whole industry. The whole airline industry has been decimated. Locking borders globally has taken all abilities for airlines to sustain themselves.”

And he adds: “There are so many opinions out there as to if the government should bail them out or not, if the whole industry has to revamp itself and change. Again, there is no perfect answer for it. The way forward for us all will be more collaboration between business events and the airlines. Events make groups travel and I believe that we all will benefit from better collaboration.”

HQ also asked convention bureaus in Europe for their views on this burning topic. “We expect to have 50% of the flight capacity back by the end of the year overall and are convinced the airlines will do whatever it takes to make certain security concepts are in place to allow to travel safely again,” Barbra Albrect, managing director of the Switzerland Convention & Incentives Bureau, says. “With our home carrier, we have an excellent collaboration, also in these difficult times and we are even more aware of the importance of it and include each other’s Information on the situation, exchange, communication and joint promotion.”

At the MeetGB webinar organised by VisitBritain, the director of tourism, conventions & major events at London & Partners. Tracy Halliwell tells us: “I think we absolutely need to support the airline industry as much as we can. Yes, we can. There’s a lot of coverage in the same kind of routes. However, we want some sort of consolidation in the airline industry. Right now, it will make it a little less competitive and the seek process will rise. But as long as those flights are still coming in some way - and I hope that the hospitality and restaurants will help us get over the initial hump. Again, and I think like the rest of us, even if we do have losses of airlines and routes they will slowly build up again in the future. Commercial business will always find a way to come back.”

And Eimear Callaghan, business solutions manager at Tourism Northern Ireland, agrees: “We will be keeping our very close sight on lobbying for Government support for the industry to maintain that access, because if people can’t get here it doesn’t matter how good our venues for conferences are. We need people to be able to come into the island. We will be watching up very closely and hoping that, as quarantines are starting to lift and safety is in place and our consumer confidence returns, we will start to see more signs of normality coming through.”

“The recovery of the meetings industry will depend on how quickly and to what extent business events and related travel will be possible again,” said Matthias Schultze, managing director of the GCB German Convention Bureau.

He mentions a recent study by Oxford Economics, on behalf of the Strategic Alliance of National Convention Bureaus of Europe, according to which domestic business travel in Europe is expected to be less affected and recover more quickly than international business travel. The study assumes that year-on-year growth will return for both domestic and international event participation in 2021, whereas international event participation will take longer to recover to pre-crisis levels.

“The key lies in consistent customer centricity: What are the needs of the customers and how can their customer journey be optimally designed?,” he concludes. “As the market continues to evolve, with business events fanning out into face-to-face, purely digital and hybrid formats, there will no longer be just ‘one’ customer journey for planners, but rather very different and diverse processes.”



“We have an opportunity to **rebuild better**”

Business Aviation is just another collateral damage from the holistic crisis we are experiencing, but it is not just another tool for our industry. The European Business Aviation Association (EBAA) is the leading organisation for operators of business aircraft in Europe, representing more than 700 different companies within the industry. *HQ* interviewed Athar Husain Khan, Secretary-General of EBAA, about their role in MICE and the aviation sector in the time of coronavirus.



— Athar Husain Khan

Business Aviation is an important stake for the air transport ecosystem, as it is for the meetings and business events sector. How closely tied are these two factors?

Business aviation represents 8% of European aviation traffic and connects 1,400 European airports, of which 900 are connected by Business aviation operators only. This sector is a specialised travel solution enabling people to meet face-to-face when time matters most. It allows passengers to have full control over their schedule and travel to at least three times more destinations in Europe than scheduled airlines. In the process, Business aviation connects many small European communities and local airports, improving connectivity across Europe. The Global Business Travel Association's (GBTA) latest poll shows that more than half of companies are considering allowing their employees

to travel again in the near future. One thing that business trips still have going for them is the human connection, which is good for profits as well as our mental health. According to *Harvard Business Review*, a face-to-face request is 34 times more successful than an email. A video call comes closer, but it's still not as effective.

How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your cluster in the industry?

Business Aviation is being severely impacted, like the rest of the aviation sector. Our industry had faced crises before, but never on the unprecedented scale of the COVID-19 pandemic. EBAA's CEOs survey revealed that financial losses due to the crisis are estimated between 50-90%, with a third of operators having had to stop operations altogether. In April, EUROCONTROL observed a 70% decrease in traffic overall, compared to

the same time last year.

But, at the end of April, Business Aviation accounted for one out of five aircraft flying in Europe, with about one of four flights attributed to medical missions. Some operators have continued to fly in the face of incredible restrictions and operational challenges to provide support to governments and health organisations worldwide.

We observed the first slight upturn in activity towards the end of May. The trend was observed in all major European Business Aviation markets. With airlines still at 90% drop of activity, Business Aviation accounted for 1 airplane out of four flying in Europe—the largest market share ever recorded for business aviation.

Business Aviation seems to be the first to emerge and facilitate the restart of

the air transport system in Europe. Yet, according to the latest EUROCONTROL figures, Business Aviation is now at 22% loss compared to the same period last year.

What is the main threat to Business Aviation in the future and what lessons are you drawing from the crisis, for instance in terms of climate action?

Challenges for post-COVID-19 recovery include lack of coordination, discrimination against some airspace users and lack of support for regional airports. Sustainability remains a priority despite the crisis. With the gradual restarting of passenger air transport in the coming weeks, EBAA and over a dozen air transport associations representing Europe's aviation sector issued an urgent call for EU leaders to prioritise specific decarbonisation initiatives, in their allocation of future COVID-19 recovery funding. We have an opportunity to rebuild better by reducing air transport emissions in the most cost-efficient way. Business Aviation's continuous investments in sustainability, health and safety, are the new normal. These support measures will help our sector regain its economic viability – a prerequisite for safeguarding both air connectivity and our ability to keep investing in decarbonisation.

How are you taking up regulations and guidelines from political authorities?

The aviation sector is global by nature; this is why we consistently highlight the need for coordinated and harmonised rules. EBAA has been very active in its

collaboration with authorities (whether at technical or political level), but we have also worked intensely with our members, to collect feedback and real-world information to help inform regulators and shape appropriate guidelines. We act as a facilitator and a link between our members and authorities, and this role has been intensified by the crisis.

What kind of policies do you intend to lobby when the dust settles?

The fundamental case for Business Aviation remains the same, if not somewhat strengthened by this crisis. The common denominator is: 'I have to travel and I'd like to have more control over it'. The market is already responding with ways to make private aviation more accessible. Business aviation operators can offer specific precautionary measures and guarantees at the highest level of safety. The accessibility and desirability of Business aviation will be a decisive factor. Our sector puts people first, from aircraft owners to passengers or employees. We have been grateful for the support of the European Commission, and EASA, as well as national governments. They have recognised the contribution of Business Aviation during the crisis, and beyond. Recent guidelines issues by European regulators recognise the specificities of our operators, and that has been an important common achievement at such a crucial time. Returning to normal operations is our sector's priority to help people meet up again and shape the wider recovery for Europe.

Why should a company or organisation consider EBAA as a strategic bet to join? On the other hand, what kind

of partnerships in the sector are you looking for to provide more services for your members?

EBAA members enjoy all the benefits of the association's expertise and strategic role in European and international decision-making. EBAA represents the entire Business aviation ecosystem. Our members can access a wide range of tools and services to advance their business and achieve growth.

Membership benefits include policy papers, industry surveys and commissioned reports with current data and statistics, best practices guides and codes of conduct, updates on critical developments within the European and international regulatory environment and essential operational changes that affect your business, EBAA's newsletters and alerts, invitations to events, member contact information for networking, and access to data services.



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“Our brand is our mission and **our mission is our method**”



Jennifer Trethewey

HQ interviewed Jennifer Trethewey, Certified Special Events Professional (CSEP) and president of the International Live Events Association (ILEA) board of governors, from 2019 to 2020. ILEA advances the live events industry by creating an inclusive global community dedicated to personal and business development, and inspiration to elevate all professionals engaged in live events. All live events are delivered through intentional design by recognized professionals. ILEA’s values are truths they stand for: creativity, inspiration, teamwork, education and relationships.

Can you tell us more about the association’s daily work, identity and membership?

ILEA is the essential community for live events professionals around the world. Our members include event planners, producers, caterers, meeting planners, decorators, audiovisual technicians, convention coordinators, entertainers, educators, photographers, hotel sales managers, and more — all dedicated to producing events that bring people together.

In the midst of a health crisis that paralysed much of the events sector and made live meetings almost impossible, what do you think of the

scenario that lies ahead and the digital alternative post COVID-19?

I think we will see more and more ‘hybrid’ events — combining digital and face-to-face elements — and they will become the norm. I am not saying that they will replace live in-person events, because nothing could ever replace the emotion, exhilaration, experience of face-to-face human interaction. But hybrid is here to stay.

From the point of view of your trade association, how do you create a strong, strategic brand identity that allows associations to increase their impact in this sector?

We create a strong brand identity by understanding that our brand is our mission and our mission is our method. Simply put: ILEA serves the live events industry, which brings people together, by bringing our members together. Sometimes that’s in person, at our ILEA Live annual conference and many local chapter events. Other times it’s online, through webinars. And sometimes it’s through programs like the CSEP (Certified Special Events Professional) designation that unites the industry via a standard of professional excellence. But the key is always to remember that our brand identity is rooted in connecting our community.



How would you rate the following terms in order of importance to build a successful live event: education, expertise, risk, anticipation?

Content is always king, but otherwise, how you rank these factors depends on what type of live event you are focusing on. If it's conferencing, then relevant and targeted education that offers attendees a robust program around personal development in an 'un-conference' environment is at the forefront. For festivals and live entertainment, risk and occupational health & safety alongside credible operators are by far the most important elements. Then, anticipation and expertise factor into just about every live event. Anticipation is generated by offering innovative and thought-provoking content, delivered by articulate and engaging subject-matter experts. The world has changed exponentially. Delegates are incredibly discerning. They demand trend forecasting, thought leadership, and the latest technology delivered in a totally unconventional way, with collaboration, inclusion, and innovation. They drive the agenda to bring authenticity and an inimitable experience to everyone who takes part. This is the future of face-to-face.

During this period of great uncertainty, does ILEA lean on a 'return to a new normal' or rather a 'paradigm shift'? Is there a possible middle ground for the MICE industry?

Change is constant and non-negotiable. Businesses in every industry everywhere in the world should continually look for ways

to improve, to keep ahead of the competition, to seek out that one thing that nobody else has or can get. That said, COVID-19 is like nothing any of us has ever experienced. It has been devastating for the live events industry and it's my belief that we will never settle into a new normal. So how do we find opportunity out of adversity? By forging ahead in collaboration. ILEA works in partnership with many other organisations to benefit our members and extend our impact. No longer can the individual groups in our industry go alone: we must be willing to share, collaborate and partner to benefit the industry holistically.

ILEA
INTERNATIONAL

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Are you **as Agile as** your Members?



Jeffery London speaks with Arie Van Bennekum about becoming agile. Jeffery is a facilitator at the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®), a top-ranked global provider of executive education that develops better leaders through its exclusive focus on leadership education and research. Arie is a co-author of 'The Agile Manifesto' and supports organisations to develop, transform and be ecosystems for innovation.

Participation and interaction are key, and agility is exactly what associations need today to be quick, fresh and relevant.

Membership involvement is on the rise! The COVID-19 situation raised many issues for associations and their leaders, but what we did not realise was how membership organisations would be positively impacted. Members are more involved, more active and more committed. We know people join associations because they believe in the purpose. The sudden shift to digital has made involvement possible, while being in confinement gave people time to reflect on what they feel is important. Members are ready for more, so, are you agile enough to let it happen?

JL: What are the habits of an agile team?

Arie Van Bennekum: Being agile is about staying in touch and adapting. We do this in daily stand-up meetings, heartbeat check-ins each couple days and retrospective debriefs each two weeks. The foundation of all this interaction is feedback and adjusting our approach quickly based on the latest results. An agile team is an engaged team and an agile association is an engaged association.

JL: How does all that talking create better results?

Arie: Results are better when you've built something that meets all the needs. Communication is the best way to gather needs. It brings people together and gets them excited about the progress being made. Doing project reviews in an agile way lowers assumptions, clarifies interpretations and allows us to adjust our course so we don't waste time.

JL: What is a leader's role in an agile association?

Arie: Purpose. Articulate the purpose of the association. That's why members join: to connect with a purpose. It is not enough to just have a compelling vision statement. Members and project teams need you to be a compass in initiatives. Especially now, when the external environment is changing so quickly. What will the 'new normal' be? It will be what we create. We need to ask ourselves 'What is my role in creating the future?' My book #YouAreTheArchitectOfYourOwnLife



talks about our choices when faced with external factors: we can accept them, change them, or leave. If we decide to stay, being proactive is much more fulfilling. When we want to make something work, the first step is to quell the internal voices of doubt and ask yourself ‘Why are you resisting this change? What is behind my “but...”?’

JL: So do we have to be personally agile?

Arie: Right. Which means staying open. To feedback, to adjusting the plan. Look at who has had the most trouble with COVID-19 confinement. Not young people: they are all connected, gaming, making the most of their social networks. Meanwhile, there are many older (by age or mentality) people who are having trouble reinventing themselves and their organisations. They feel isolated. Why go it alone? Work through this with a partner. Get fresh-minded people on board. A lot more is possible #withalittlehelpfrommyfriends.

JL: How can we bring agility to our members?

Arie: Make it easy for people. One click. No extra downloads. Make sure there is a low threshold technology. Think about your Annual General Meeting (AGM). A lot of people don’t show up because they don’t have the time, the travel budget, and probably don’t want to just sit and listen. Now you can get people involved so easily. They can click and watch, ask questions on a platform, volunteer to host a breakout conversation, or get the recording for later. Your members are already agile, the question is have you put the infrastructure in place to make their participation easy?

JL: What is the opportunity for leaders and members?

Arie: Real connection. It used to be that we needed to be in the same room to have the feeling of psychological safety. That has changed. Suddenly, we can find ourselves in an online breakout session having an intimate conversation that bridges old hierarchies. Now we have quick one to one over whatsapp, in a way that wasn’t possible when we had to make an appointment with a secretary to have a meeting with the boss.

JL: Any advice to improve this connection?

Arie: Up the rhythm. Have more interactions, of shorter duration. Intensifying the frequency is what we do with agile projects. It helps us fine-tune our initiatives as our organisations keep transforming. When we wrote the Agile Manifesto, we spoke about Face-to-Face communication, not Body-to-Body. Now that it is so easy to have a video call, take advantage of it.

JL: What’s your ‘new normal’?

Arie: I am based in The Netherlands, but until recently 95% of my business was in China. Suddenly that stopped. I had to ask myself: do I accept having no work, do I leave or do I change? So, I am changing. The four-week Face-to-Face intensives I used to offer are now remote eight-week platform events. I used to be on stage, now I am on camera from home. Doing remote facilitation is not new for me – coming out of the software industry, we were all remote – but now I need to say ‘We can facilitate this remotely’, which is a bit crazy because we have been doing that forever.

“Leaders and members can have an intimate connection, that was never possible before.”

Many thanks to Arie Van Bennekum for talking with us about becoming agile. For more, see his services at wemanimity.com and thought leadership at arievandenbennekum.com. Jeffer London is a facilitator at the Center for Creative Leadership and sits on the board of the International Association of Facilitators. See Jeffer’s tools for dialogue at stimulatingconversation.org and engagement facilitation services at jeffer-london.com.



Why Are Associations More Relevant Today?

The current crisis has brought many challenges to most economic sectors. Associations, like many others, fell for a while into this middle dimension, a constantly spinning vortex with an unclear way out. The anchor for associations proved to be their communities. But why is that and can societies do even more to continue to grow in these times?

The explosion of online content confronted us with different sources of information, and in some cases raising the question of legitimacy of the ideas we consumed. For medical doctors, their association memberships proved relevant to help solve this problem, through facilitating community discussions and providing accessible peer-reviewed materials, specific to their specialty.

Good news for societies around the world, the doors suddenly opening to a much larger audience that is looking for guidance. Associations should not overlook this opportunity and assume that new members will always find their way in the sea of information that is the Internet. Being online more has meant we are all better versed in finding our way around the web, yet, to ensure the

message can be found, strong branding should be the beacon in the sea, supported by a crystal-clear marketing strategy leading new members to the right location.

Associations, young and old, are founded with a clear why in place – a purpose that drives each of their activities. This is the building block used to create the foundations of a strong brand. While it is not necessary to rethink an organisation's branding, especially in a moment where resources should be correctly spent, fine-tuning the marketing strategy remains an action that must be performed regularly. Securing that the why is clear, and well placed within the society's marketing and messaging is vital to cut through the deafening noise of this virtual life.

As in every tough situation, rays of light and moments of opportunity reveal themselves. For associations, the time is now. There is a need for them, for their communities to come together. To grow. To overcome these times as one. To do that they need their mission to be clear and well represented in their marketing and branding. A strong brand in place will subside the challenging winds and the beams of opportunity will be abundant.



ABOUT KENES GROUP

For over fifty years, Kenes Group has been creating success stories with associations around the world. We're experts in helping associations reach their true potential by strategically building awareness, loyalty and satisfaction among current and potential members, as well as stakeholders. We harness the power of community, strengthening your association's brand through unforgettable experiences - fostering change, inspiring members, educating, and improving your association's business performance.

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Bids + Branding:

How to **Incorporate Association Branding** in your Next Bid

When it comes to assembling a bid for a particular conference, PCOs need to stand out. Not only must they establish their experience and qualifications, but they need to demonstrate their ability to be creative and support the association. A valuable way to display this creativity and team spirit is by integrating the association's brand into the bid itself. This can come in many forms, from incorporating the colours and style of an association's brand into the layout and packaging of the bid to proposing a brand specific for the conference itself.

In this article, some partners of the World PCO Alliance offer their perspectives on the value of incorporating an association's brand in a bid, and some good general practices.

Alliance partners feel that incorporating association branding in a bid offers many advantages, and they regularly find ways of incorporating an association's branding in their bids. What are some key ways to incorporate an association's branding into a bid? Here are some suggestions:

- Use a strong local image that's tied into the destination, or into the theme of the conference and the local society.
- Feature both the local and international society logo, or some variation.
- Use colours that match the association's own logo/brand/colours that complement the bidding destination. Along similar lines, consider the overall image of the destination. Japan-based **Congrès Inc.** will typically fuse traditional and modern designs that reflect the two appealing faces of Japan—the traditional, and the innovation found in science and technology.

While incorporating an association's branding in a bid seems straightforward, a PCO's decision to create a brand specific to a conference is a whole other matter. So, how does one determine whether such an endeavour is worthwhile? Alliance president Noel Mitchell from **Keynote PCO** advises looking back at previous editions of the conference and examining whether the association has a tendency to design conference-specific brands. Noel also advises PCOs reach out to the local organizing committee for a second opinion on whether designing a new brand is worthwhile. If so, and the internal resources and timeline are sufficient, then the design process begins. While there are numerous possible approaches, Noel recommends starting with any existing or past association branding, and designing a complementary look.

While there is a recent trend in medical association meetings of extending the congress design theme across several years, there is still room for originality. Even if the basic design theme is the same, it can be supplemented with photos or illustrations of iconic landmarks of the destination city, thereby creating something unique. For a bid for a ministerial meeting, **Congrès Inc.** designed a logo that included an abstract design of an apple, as the meeting took place in a region famous for apples. **Congrès Inc.** also suggests paying attention to conference themes or a particular milestone. In the case of a medical conference, for example, perhaps a new breakthrough in the field will be the prime topic. Other times, conferences might put the spotlight on a particular specialty. All of these elements can be incorporated into a brand.

Of course, PCOs must also suggest which conference elements to brand and how. For the 3rd Global Ministerial Conference

on Road Safety, Caroline Knies of Sweden's **MeetAgain** proposed a branding approach for the whole venue, including the registration area, main stage, press room, and all indoor and outdoor signage.

But there is such a thing as too much creativity, which leads to branding that misses the mark. For one, remember that cultures react differently to colours, so be aware of and sensitive to these differences. Avoid creating a new brand that is unrelated to the association's own brand, especially if it generates a different title or event acronym, as this is confusing and counter-productive. Another 'no-no' is overcomplicating a slogan, theme or message. Branding is all about clarity.

While there is no doubt creating any form of new branding for a conference requires work with no guarantee that a PCO will win the bid, it shows a PCO's serious approach and extra effort in backing the bid. "I can't think of a reason to exclude branding in a bid," says Noel Mitchell. "Ultimately, you want to be remembered, and celebrating an association's brand is a viable way for your bid to stand out from the pack."



World PCO Alliance

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WORLDPCO.ORG



Meetings in South Africa, **The Home of Humanity**

Collaboration, networking, sharing and impact. Meetings Africa 2020, organised by the South Africa National Convention Bureau, a business unit of South African Tourism, is taking the continent to the biggest international stages of business events. HQ flew to Johannesburg in February to report this critical trade fair before the coronavirus pandemic.

Manuel A. Fernandes reports

▲ The main entrance of Sandton Convention Centre

The last of its kind

Getting ready to embark towards the southern hemisphere on the 21st of February, we could barely foresee the hard months ahead. In the apparent indifference of most passengers and serenity at Istanbul Atatürk Airport, where few masks were yet to be seen, the prospect of the first half of the year without events was still afar.

What we didn't know was that the 15th edition of Meetings Africa was going to be the first and last event trade show of 2020 to date. Major business shows like IMEX Frankfurt, ITB Berlin or other exhibitions like Mobile World Congress or Geneva Auto Show started to fall like a house of cards in front of the viral pandemic that shook the MICE scene.

While this threat was starting to loom over the industry, the South African National Convention Bureau (SANCB) promoted an inspection tour to the media along with the official event, Meetings Africa, at the Sandton Convention Centre. An exceptional timing that repaid the efforts of SANCB in yet another annual meeting of the various

African Convention Bureaus and business events in Africa. A fast-growing industry across the continent that saw this annual fair as a landmark moment for Africa's progressive affirmation on the world map of meetings and events. In fact, the South African Minister of Tourism Mmamoloko Kubayi-Ngubane recently said that Africa's growing economies, improved infrastructure and growing tourism sector in a globalised environment have led to the improvement in the continent's MICE supply sector.

In the case of South Africa, events are one of the most vital and rapidly growing industries in the country which is reflected in its first-class convention centres and its track record in international events such as COP17, the 5th BRICS Summit, and the World Economic Forum. It is estimated that international tourism contributed around €4,2 billion to the country's GDP with 10,2 arrivals in 2019, according to the 'South African Tourism'. This trend is behind the creation of direct jobs in the country and acts as a catalyst for the development of new industries as well as traditional ones like agriculture, mining or manufacturing. Meetings Africa is, therefore, an essential asset to the continent

and a unique opportunity to lend a huge voice for a common path.

In the recently revealed 2019 ICCA rankings, South Africa leads the number of meetings per country in the Middle East Africa; as for cities, Cape Town tops the ranking in the continent with Johannesburg and Durban also in the top. If we add world-class facilities and state-of-the-art convention centres, such as the Tshwane Events Centre, East London International Convention Centre (ICC), Cape Town ICC, CSIR ICC or Durban ICC we will understand why the focus of tourism in Africa has turned so strongly to events.

Ambitious SA

From the 24th to the 26th of February, Johannesburg became the backbone of the African meetings industry. Welcoming around 17 nations - Kenya, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Republic of Congo, just to name a few - on display for buyers from all over the world, the Sandton Convention Centre was bursting at the seams with a massive influx of delegates from

various industry stakeholders. “15 years of advancing Africa together” is much more than a slogan: tourism and business events have been a valuable lever for several small companies in the hospitality sector, boosting African economies and one of the youngest workforce of around 20 million (according to the Africa Centre for Economic Transformation) people who join the market every year. New African centres (like Sandton) embedded a vibrant adaptation of this model with new hotels, top convention venues and facilities aligned with the ambitions of the 21st century delegates. The building’s main pavilion proved it with numbers to support this story: 329 exhibitors were able to engage in future agreements with 352 buyers from all over the world, in a total occupation of the space. The theme, ‘Shared economies’ ran throughout the event, being a common denominator for all the sessions and lectures that featured the highest figures of African Tourism. As Amanda Kotze-Nhlapo, Chief Convention Bureau Officer of the SANCB said: “Meetings Africa is geared to enhance the collaboration between African countries and African associations so as to create more shared economic benefits for the continent’s business events sector.” An argument supported by **South African Tourism** CEO, Sisa Ntshona: “It’s important that Africa speaks with one voice, for the continent to hunt together. That’s why these business meetings events such as Meetings Africa need to rotate within the continent. When one African country grows in tourism, we all grow.”

Clarification sessions in the media centre also touched on the subject of aviation, with the presentation of an extensive rescue plan by South African Airways focused on domestic partnerships and the company’s role on this human airlift for delegates.

Despite all the economic factors, one of the most undervalued aspects when it comes to business fairs and MICE is the human and so the ability to intertwine global views, perspectives and dialectics. Here, Africa imposes itself beyond reproach. “We are all in the business of connecting people and bringing people together through events,” said the keynote speaker Sumathi Ramanathan, Director of

Destination Marketing for Dubai Expo 2020, echoing the theme of the relationships and inspirational ideas. “The power of events is not only in filling hotel beds and conference meals. But, when done properly, events have real purpose and have the potential to touch humanity and individuals.”

This is particularly important when facing such important challenges for a continent that recorded 415 international association meetings in 2019 (according to ICCA) and that sees business events as a socio-economic lift for businesses and future generations. As a plus, Africa brings diversity, colour, authenticity and an increasing desire to meddle in these same rankings. It should be highlighted.

The message is clear: Meetings Africa is all about business and people and it is eager to assert itself globally as an ultimate platform for MICE.

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Birmingham is Like an **Open Air Theatre**

Having spent three years of my life in the UK, I think I will always miss the gentle British manners and their love for stories. My trip to Birmingham and the West Midlands was a sweet combination of hospitality and entertainment, just like a night out for a Shakespeare play.

Emanuela Barbiroglio reports

▲ Wolverhampton Wanderers FC stadium

The beautiful West Midlands, England's heart 'where the world meets' and Birmingham (nicknamed *Brum*), is purpose-built for successful events. Frequently voted best meetings destination outside London by BMEIS and Cvent, providing truly world-class convention facilities and over 36,000 bed spaces, it is easily accessible from 95% of the UK within four hours travel time. Birmingham Airport (BHX) is situated just a 10-minute away from the city centre by train or 20-30 minute by taxi and bus.

The West Midlands' key industries are Business, Professional and Financial Services - worth £28.7 billion to the region and employing more than 358,000 people - followed by Manufacturing and Life Sciences.

One of the youngest populations in the country makes a particularly exciting lifestyle once the day's conference is done - with unrivalled social activities, world-class arts and culture, Michelin-starred restaurants and unlimited entertainment, leaving a lasting impression on delegates.

And the best is yet to come: the West Midlands will be home to the UK City of Culture 2021 and Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. With millions of people across the globe watching from home and hundreds-of-thousands set to visit the region, both events will shine a spotlight on the region's heritage, culture and sporting prowess.

"Birmingham and the West Midlands has long been a favourite for association conferences thanks to its central UK location, affordable offer, large number of bed spaces and the breadth and depth of its venues," says Stephanie Mynett, visitor economy business development manager at the West Midlands Growth Company (which aims to attract visitors, investment and events to the region).

"What sets this region apart is its people. The West Midlands is a region of doers and achievers where deeds mean more than words, and one of the most innovative and dynamic areas in the world. From our proud industrial heritage, to the pioneering,

present-day work of our universities, our inventive population continues to make its mark."

The West Midlands has the largest number of medical technology and device companies in the country, totalling over 13,000.

The city, staged

On my arrival at Birmingham New Street station, it is a short 2-minute walk to Malmaison Hotel (193 bedrooms, six meeting rooms hosting up to 120 people in theatre style). Other hotels in the city include: Hilton Birmingham Metropole (790 bedrooms, 33 meeting rooms hosting up to 1,732 people



in theatre style) and Hyatt Regency Birmingham (four stars, 319 bedrooms of which 12 suites, 16m swimming pool and 10 function rooms hosting up to 240 people in theatre style).

When you move across the main area of the city, you'd find yourself centre stage. Indeed, you can easily see and access everything from the station to the hotel area to the main event locations through a system of connecting bridges. You can enter the Repertory Theatre and the iconic Library of Birmingham, fused together so that culture is accessible for visitors. Marvelled for its state of the art infrastructure and ability to host world-class events, the venue can host events for 10 to 3,000 people and it is one of the city's most accessible positions for accommodation and transport. Award winning chef Simon Hellier has dedicated his time to the ICC since 1991 and has ensured consideration and innovation is evident on every plate. If that's still not enough, the Symphony Hall is just a few steps away. It is widely considered one of the finest Concert Halls in the world and is conveniently housed within the ICC.

"We recognise that the event experience extends beyond our services at the ICC, and so this thriving destination often provides further reasoning for event organisers to select the ICC for events from across the world," Donna Cunningham, acting sales director for NEC Group Conventions, says.

Backstage

Full of heritage and attractions, at least three more places deserve a visit. The Jewellery Quarter is a symbol of the growing arts scene, a real hidden gem. The Black Country is now one of the finest and largest open-air museums in the UK and the official home of BBC epic

gangster drama *Peaky Blinders*. Finally, Wolverhampton is conveniently 30 minutes away by train from Birmingham Airport, served by three intercity railway stations, the largest being Birmingham New Street station (just a 10 minute walk or 3 minute tram ride from the International Convention Centre).

"In the past five years we have noticed a significant increase in companies wanting to come to Wolverhampton for events, this due to the development of the city, along with investment in venues like ours, to attract these companies in," says Danny Thompson, head of sales and business development at Grand Station. "The city is a popular conferencing destination in the country, thanks to its excellent central location, highly accessible transportation links and rich arts and cultural offering."

Wolverhampton Art Gallery and Wolverhampton Grand Theatre will sort you out together with the Wolverhampton Wanderers FC (now established as one of the largest conference and events venues in the Black Country with 13 and 17 executive suites and room for 500 attendees) and the Grand Station (offering an elegant and versatile setting to hold all types of corporate events and has a seating capacity of up to 1,000 delegates). Then sleep at the Mount Hotel (2AA Rosette awarded for culinary excellence, 67 bedrooms of which six suites and one apartment, nine meeting rooms hosting up to 140 people in theatre style).

Spectacle

And finally there's the National Exhibition Centre (NEC). Spaces are flexible, people are friendly and experience unrivalled. With 19 halls, 34 conference suites, and

182,000sqm of covered space, blank canvases don't come any bigger than the NEC. Connections to Birmingham Airport and Birmingham International train station are super easy, over 16,000 car parking spaces are available and The Bear Grylls Adventure completes the complex. Located on the NEC campus and opened in 2018, this is the place where you can test your limits on some of the world's most incredible, mental and physical challenges. Afterwards, you can take a break at the newly opened Moxy Hotel or the beautiful Hilton Birmingham Metropole (over 700 bedrooms and 33 unique event spaces able to host a small gathering or a conference for up to 2,000).

"The connectivity of the city to the rest of the country is unrivalled, and the location of Birmingham Airport, within covered walking distance of the NEC, provides international travellers with seamless access to our venues and the region," the marketing director for NEC Group Conventions & Exhibitions Kelly Haslehurst adds. "Coupled with the ever-growing investment into the region, the West Midlands is a business and leisure hotspot, which continues to attract events on a global platform."



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▼ *The National Exhibition Centre*





The **Regenerative Approach** for Association Resilience

“We are facing unprecedented times”, has been the mantra of the past months. Rightly so, with the events industry grinding to sudden halt, and only now slowly returning to a new normal. This new normal is going to be affected by more waves of the current pandemic and associated restrictions, alongside impacts of changing climate patterns and a global collapse of the economy. With many industries struggling for survival, building capacity for resilience is crucial. For associations, events, and meetings, fostering industry-wide resilience will have to pivot around the creation of a strong value proposition.



Noah Joubert is a sustainability consultant of the Global Destination Sustainability Index, a global programme that benchmarks destination management strategy and performance, and consults cities to rebuild thriving tourism and events destinations that serve their citizens and ecosystems.

Defining our Value

What is it that events and associations bring to the table? What is it that we contribute to global and intergenerational well-being? Aside from the tremendous economic impact, which in the US alone is estimated to be 845 billion dollars just in 2016, the lasting legacy of events can improve the lives of those living in host destinations. And most importantly, the MICE industry connects industries, and brings together the brightest minds of our time.

As national recovery plans are starting to take shape around the world, we need

to leverage our ability to bring together industries, and to create spaces for collaboration and innovation. We need to be reaching out to policy makers, and get a seat at the table, to ensure that the value we bring is utilised during the recovery.

The Regenerative Approach

Recovery without forethought about the long-term impacts is short-sighted at best, and detrimental to global environmental and social well-being at worst. For this reason, we need to take a regenerative approach. An approach that does not repair the old, and patch what's already broken, but reimagines the

new. With the goal to rebuild a regenerative and resilient tourism and events economy that works for everyone. An industry that generates jobs and spreads prosperity inclusively and fairly. A resilient, vibrant, and flourishing industry, that grows in harmony with, and not against, nature and its boundaries. An industry that regenerates cities, people, and the nature around us.

Next Steps

As we educate, inspire, certify and unite people through associations, we need to advocate for a regenerative recovery. Associations can be the voice of our respective industries in this time of need, and as we start meeting again, we need to build and facilitate relationships with our host destinations, and ask ourselves how our events can deliver positive local impacts. This could be by raising awareness on social or environmental issues, creating collaborations that help solve these issues beyond an event's duration, or generating new long-term employment. An example of this is INTECOL in New Zealand, which will raise awareness on “our understanding of wetland biodiversity and ecosystem management and broaden the awareness of the ‘wise use’ of natural resources for sustainable development” (Meet4Impact).

As associations and the events industry reinvent themselves to traverse the uncertain paths of new territory, the guiding star should be a vision for a regenerative future. One that acknowledges and celebrates the economic benefits we bring to the world, while being painfully aware that for true resilience, we need to amplify our positive impacts on societies and the environment.



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A Strong Strategic Brand Identity Means a Strong Impact



Thanks to Monica Freire, director of the congress department at AIM Group International Lisbon, we delve into the benefits of a smart association brand in times of crisis.

Branding has for long time been synonymous with product and service promotion applied to commercial activities and viewed with some distrust by non-profit associations. How many times in our business have we heard our clients say: “Our association is scientific, looking for quality content and does not aim to make a profit”, or “We are focused on research and scientific sharing and events are our main means of communication”...?

All of this is true, but do these associations cater to all their members and community needs?

In recent years, we have witnessed a change in this paradigm with the democratisation of branding. It’s a change in the way associations are viewing their strategic position and understanding the importance that branding can have to stay relevant. A way to stand out in an increasingly competitive industry.

Branding an association is much more than creating a logo and promoting meetings. Associations now need more than ever to think in a holistic and strategic way. Having a well-defined mission is only a first step towards a consolidated

strategy: more than identifying what you represent, it is necessary to establish the means to achieve your ends: what is your unique selling proposition? what are your short and long-term objectives? how will you plan in a concerted manner in order to reach each of your target audience?

Smart branding has become essential for the survival of associations as much as any other entity. Establishing a bond of recognition, a sense of belonging and making sure that you deliver what you promise.

So, what is a smart strategy for an association? Obviously, there isn’t any ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution, but for sure solutions involve a more business-oriented vision. Setting goals for your activities, a careful SWOT analysis, implementing your KPIs and measuring your results using all the analytics tools you have at your disposal. Never forget to listen to your members and establish a constant and bi-directional communication with them.

When we look at the last few months, we cannot help thinking that associations with this strategic vision are better fit to face such unprecedented events. Maintaining multichannel communication not only

has allowed associations to survive, but it also showed that they are able to stay relevant to their members. COVID-19 has been an enormous challenge, but also a way to turn times of adversity into new opportunities.

We all know that physical events are irreplaceable for associations and its members. We also know that scientific exchange is particularly important in times of medical emergency. The transformation of physical events into fully virtual, although temporarily, is part of this growing capacity to create new branding solutions: connectivity between associations and their membership, hybrid and longer lifespan events, bite-size content, etc. All these opportunities must now be seized by associations to allow sustainable growth and get closer to their target audiences.



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This article was provided by the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers, which represents today 140 companies comprised of over 9900 professional congress organisers, meeting planners and managers of international and national congresses, conventions and special events from 40 countries. AIM Group International is one of the world leaders in the organisation of events and conferences whose philosophy is summed up in: dynamism, reliability, flexibility.



Strategic Branding: **Focusing on the Essentials** in the Post- COVID World

The post-COVID 'new normal' requires us looking honestly at our core mission and the promises we make to our members. Branding may just be the tool for this exercise. While most of us think 'new logo', it encompasses much more than eye-catching design. Strategic branding is a way to ensure strategic relevance and focus in a changing world. It invites us to focus on the essential, while creating a clear vision and internal alignment that allow us to be innovative and creative.



BENITA LIPPS

Head of Association Management

“Just slap a logo on it”: Common misconceptions about branding

*“A brand is no longer what we tell the consumer it is—it is what consumers tell each other it is.”
Scott Cook*

Branding is not just about how things look. A new coat of brand paint cannot hide negative member experiences or the fact that an association may be badly run. This so-called 'brand washing' may give you a new surface shine but the underlying questions or challenges remain. Real branding on the other hand provides clarity and focus on all strategic aspects of your association. While this includes the way your association communicates visually, it goes far beyond mere logo design.

Branding is not a marketing fad. Branding has evolved from the time when it was handled exclusively by big advertising firms, employed to broadcast a positive message about a product into the world. These days, it is no longer about how we would like to appear, it is about who we are to our members. Branding allows your association to communicate more effectively with your community. Not because you have better visuals or bigger advertising budgets, but because you have a clear message and distinct value proposition.

Branding is not something only big companies do, just because global corporations own the most talked about brands. Today, strategic branding depends less on budgets and more on a willingness to evolve. Developing your brand is a strategic exercise that invites key stakeholders to come together and agree how their association makes a real difference. This does not require big budgets, just an honest commitment to a common cause.

Setting the Foundations for Relevance: What branding is

“A Brand is not a logo, not what it looks like when I look at your product. A Brand is a shortcut, it is a shortcut for all the expectations I have for what you are about to do for me. It’s a shortcut for trust, for promises, for conversations.”
Seth Godin

Branding helps you focus. Associations are faced with as many different expectations and demands as there are members. By trying to please everyone a little, we end up pleasing no one and diluting our impact and purpose. Branding gives direction and provides the basis for strategic decision making. Branding informs your choices when it comes to new opportunities and builds a stronger company culture with shared values and aligned actions throughout.

Branding makes you visible. Once you know who you are, and what you are not, you can communicate your uniqueness and proudly differentiate from others. Honesty and clarity help members, sponsors, and partners to make a choice, and ensure that expectations are met. By developing your association brand, you do not leave members satisfaction to chance, you compromise less and have more visibility in a crowded environment.

Branding helps you align. A brand is more than a mission statement, it is the ‘promise’ you and your entire team are making to members every day. It is the catalyst for everything you do, from your communications strategy, to your HR policy,

and even the choice of location for your events. Branding gives you a clear strategic roadmap for decision making: whether it is in governance bodies, in the secretariat or when dealing with member requests.

Associations surviving an increasingly TUNA World

More than ever, we operate in a drastically changing environment. Even before the coronavirus pandemic, many associations were struggling to remain relevant. Free online access to expert content and new platforms for networking and learning, have forced the sector to ask uncomfortable questions about the services they offer.

In addition to technological transformation, the all-encompassing feeling of uncertainty has been compounded by other factors such as growing global economic interdependence and mounting political instability. We learned that we are now living in a ‘TUNA world’ (i.e. on that is turbulent, uncertain, novel, and ambiguous), but not what to do about it. And then, the coronavirus hit, raising the levels of anxiety and unpredictability to new heights. The economic effects of the pandemic will be long-lasting with forecasts suggesting government deficits could reach \$30 trillion by 2023. In addition, the pandemic has led to a change in attitudes, behaviours, and habits with our stakeholders.

The coronavirus has essentially become the catalyst and accelerator for a societal transformation. And this new society needs new associations.

Regaining Relevance in a Brand-New World

While it is true that the COVID-enforced need for rapid adaptation has left some associations struggling, it is inspiring to see that many have faced the challenges with agility, ingenuity, and a can-do attitude. Staff have adapted to a new reality of working remotely, general meetings have been transformed into

virtual events, and members have found ways to connect online.

While many associations had to face the negative fall-out of the coronavirus crisis, there are also countless associations that emerged stronger than ever. We have seen associations harness the power of new digital formats to increase access to events, members have used their association as a platform to build good practices, key policymakers have been willing to ‘Zoom in’, and sponsors have become visible partners. What differentiates the ‘COVID winners’ from the ‘COVID losers’? One key factor is the willingness to change.

The importance of successful adaptation should not be understated: associations have long been portrayed as dinosaurs, highly averse to change. The coronavirus pandemic has shown to leadership, staff, and members alike that fast change is possible, and that adaptability is rewarded. Today, we are running out of excuses not to embark on a deep review of our core mission, to ask the questions we all fear: Why should our members come to us? What can we do better than anyone else? What must we do - and what must we give up - to regain relevance? Welcome to strategic branding!



Does your association need support or strategic guidance? Get in touch at

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Smart Branding or Diversity Fronting?



Roy Gluckman

CEO of Cohesion Collective.

Want Roy to speak at your next function? Visit his website at www.roygluckman.com Further, for more information or assistance with driving an inclusive culture at your association or your member organisations, contact Cohesion Collective.

Even as a queer man, I never fully took the time to understand the activist slogan “LGBTIQ Rights are Human Rights”. So, let us unpack the slogan together. If you, the reader, believe in human rights as a concept, given that LGBTIQ people are indeed humans, then your belief in human rights, by implication, must include LGBTIQ equality, freedoms and human dignity without limitation. To expand on the point, if you, the reader, support #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo and any other movement that seeks to provide protection for marginalise identities, then there is no way that you cannot support LGBTIQ Pride and inclusion. Period. Similarly, it is worth explicitly mentioning, that if you support LGBTIQ Pride and inclusion, there is no way that you cannot support #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo.

Why is that? Well, what undergirds all of these movements is the challenge to a system of behaviours and structures that seek to exclude, discriminate and harm (even kill) black, female and queer bodies. It is the same historic system that promotes ‘us’ vs ‘them’, with the ‘them’ being seen as inferior and less worthy; as deserving of harm.

While our associations and members’ workplaces are far more sophisticated systems that rarely sees physical violence against marginalised identities, there are subtle penalties or micro-violences of exclusion that exist within those spaces: the sniggers, ‘joking’ remarks, who gets the ‘sexy work’ and promotion gloss-overs often confirm one’s marginalised identity as not being fully welcomed within a space. For historically marginalised identities, the fear of incurring these penalties encourage one to try and hide those portions of themselves; to limit their exposure. This is what is called ‘passing’. To either fully hide certain traits and facts about oneself, or to adopt affirming traits of privileged identities to appear as ‘one of the gang’. Examples of ‘passing’ include,

but are not limited to, refraining from talking about one’s partner as an LGBTIQ person for fear of having to ‘out’ oneself; of not talking about your children too much, and refraining from showing too much emotion if you are a women; or limiting the use of vernacular languages in favour of speaking “proper” English. The strategy of ‘passing’ seeks to make the employee experience of marginalised-identity employees as painless as possible by trying their best to keep as close to what is seen as **safe, familiar, valuable and likeable**. When ‘passing’ one can only hope to survive, never thrive.

The United States Supreme Court recently expanded the interpretation of an act that bans discrimination based on sex, to include sexual orientation and gender identity. A fantastic achievement, yet let me take this opportunity to gloat about my home country, South Africa. Under the South African Bill of Rights, and through a series of affirming and expanding case law, South Africa has had such protections for gender and sexual minorities since 1996! Our Constitutional democracy remains a beacon of light for LGBTIQ persons, the world over.



The real question, however, is whether legislative reform automatically changes societal behaviours. The answer? Unfortunately not. LGBTIQ identities in the workplace, particularly black and brown LGBTIQ identities, continue to suffer micro-violences and the list of penalties listed above. And while yes, such penalties would amount to discrimination and be protectable under certain legislation, the process of addressing, escalating and proving these behaviours are often met with denial, or further victimisation. As such, the potential risks associated with addressing issues of micro-violence often deter LGBTIQ employees from raising them, thus rendering their experiences of micro-violences invisible; a micro-violence in and of itself. These micro-violences not only affect the emotional state of marginalised-identity employees, but also have real material effects on one's career progression, promotion opportunities and considerations for leadership roles.

Diversity Fronting and 'Smart Branding'

Organisations have become incredibly adept at 'smart branding' when it comes to diversity. Our associations and member websites often display images of a young, energetic and diverse workforces; working together for a common goal. These images are often used to signal to the viewer that this organisation 'gets it'; that everyone is welcome in spite of their diversity; that diversity is celebrated. The reality, however, is that while diversity may be notionally encouraged, most marginalised-identity employees rarely feel included. Feeling included is about being comfortable to abandon the strategy of 'passing' without fear of reprisal, or having access to opportunities limited; to bring one's full self to work. Placing these diverse images on websites, brochures and advertisements when the actual employee experience is one of exclusion, micro-violences and discomfort is not smart branding, but diversity fronting and is not only disingenuous, potentially damaging to the brand, but also a huge missed

opportunity to truly interrogate your levels of inclusion within your organisations. And while there is a plethora of research that proves the benefits of diversity, for me, most importantly, inclusion works to improve the quality of trust and relationships between team members, which ultimately affects quality thinking, actions and results.

You, the reader, have the power to create a more inclusive organisation. How fantastic is that?! This is so doable! You have the power to create moments of comfort and advocate for greater access for marginalised-identity employees. To repurpose your privilege; to become an ally.

And while I acknowledge that more needs to be done to change societal systems of exclusion and that for black, female and queer identities the current status quo means potential death, I also recognise that such urgency may escape those who feel supported by and benefit from systems of privilege. So, as a starting point, I urge you, the reader, to host and attend conversations around race and privilege as a white person, to create or join the women's forum as a man and to motivate for or attend the LGBTIQ Pride event as a straight person. So that you, the reader, may get a glimpse at the inequality of employee experience that exists within your organisation and begin to drive diversity and inclusion, not front about. That is smart branding. Culture and the employee experience of your association or member organisations is the loudest advertisement out there. Make sure you get the inside working well; that is the smartest branding you can do! Promise.

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Brand your Organisation as **Something Special**

Sometimes when we start talking about how important your “brand identity” is in the marketplace, we automatically think of the branding challenges facing destinations and venues, especially in the COVID-19 era and beyond. However, we shouldn’t forget that there is a very synergistic relationship that exists between the customer base (associations) and the provider base (the hospitality industry), and the association side of this equation needs to be concerned about its brand, too.

When we went through the travel panics after 9/11 and the cut-backs of the 2009 recession, many in the association world felt that travel, hospitality, trade shows, and conferences would go through an extended “buyers’ market” as destinations and properties tried to lure back their customers. Neither of those buyers’ markets lasted as long as we thought. This one won’t either. We in the association world need to realize that effective branding by venues and destinations makes us want to do business with them.

Our branding should make them want to do business with us, too.

We should all hope that our organisation’s “brand” makes us a client that any destination, conference center, hotel, or city would love to use as an example of the quality clients they serve. Many of us in the association world, unfortunately, don’t realize that our brand – our image in the marketplace – is more under our control than we think.

Here are four keys to create your organisation’s brand with your various stakeholders and publics:

1. Brand your organization through quality control and consistency;

Don’t try to be all things to all people, even to your own members. Set quality control standards on everything your organization does before you offer it to your members, stakeholders, and various publics. Do not force meetings or publications or social media communications that don’t meet a specific list of quality standards. How would you like to live in a world where when someone is asked about your organisation the response is, “Well, I don’t know everything about the organisation but I can tell you this – whatever they do, they do it first class.” You can make that image be a reality.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Levin, CAE, CSP has more than 25 years of experience as an association executive and is also an internationally-known speaker and consultant to the nonprofit and association community. He currently serves as executive vice president of the Chain Link Fence Manufacturers Institute, an international trade association, and as President of B.A.I., Inc., his speaking and consulting firm.

2. Brand your organisation through affiliation;

One of the very best ways to brand your organisation in a positive light is through the establishment of key affiliations. Members and supporters want to be part of an organisation that use the word “partner” frequently and credibly. Develop a reputation as an organisation that is more concerned with outcomes and impact than you are with who is getting the largest part of the credit. “Win – win” isn’t just a negotiating term, it’s a culture.

3. Brand your organization through slogans and images;

Your visual and communications images are also a critical part of your brand. You may not have the resources to create something as memorable and recognizable as the McDonald’s Golden Arches or the Nike “swoosh” but you can stand out from the crowd by identifying your organisation’s uniqueness through your logos, letterhead, and social media images, etc. Find ways to communicate your mission and your impact (value) effectively, and you won’t have any trouble attracting partners.

4. Brand your organization through customer loyalty;

Remember when McDonald’s used to list on their signs how many hamburgers they sold worldwide? At one point, it was well above 50 billion hamburgers. They didn’t do that just to brag about the amount. Their point was “we couldn’t sell these many hamburgers if people didn’t keep coming back!” They were branding their company through their customer loyalty rate.

In our associations, our member retention rate is our customer loyalty rate, our customer satisfaction rate. What better

message to send to all of your publics than “we not only represent ‘x’ thousand members worldwide, but our retention rate is nearly 90%. That means our average members stays for more than 10 years. In today’s marketplace, that’s a great sign we’re giving them the value they seek.”

Creating a brand that tells your organisation’s story the way you want it told, creates not only an “image” but also a reputation as a successful and reliable partner. Yes, destinations and venues want your business (especially now) but they don’t want to just make sales - they want to build mutually beneficial relationships. Let them know you are the kind of organisation with which to build them

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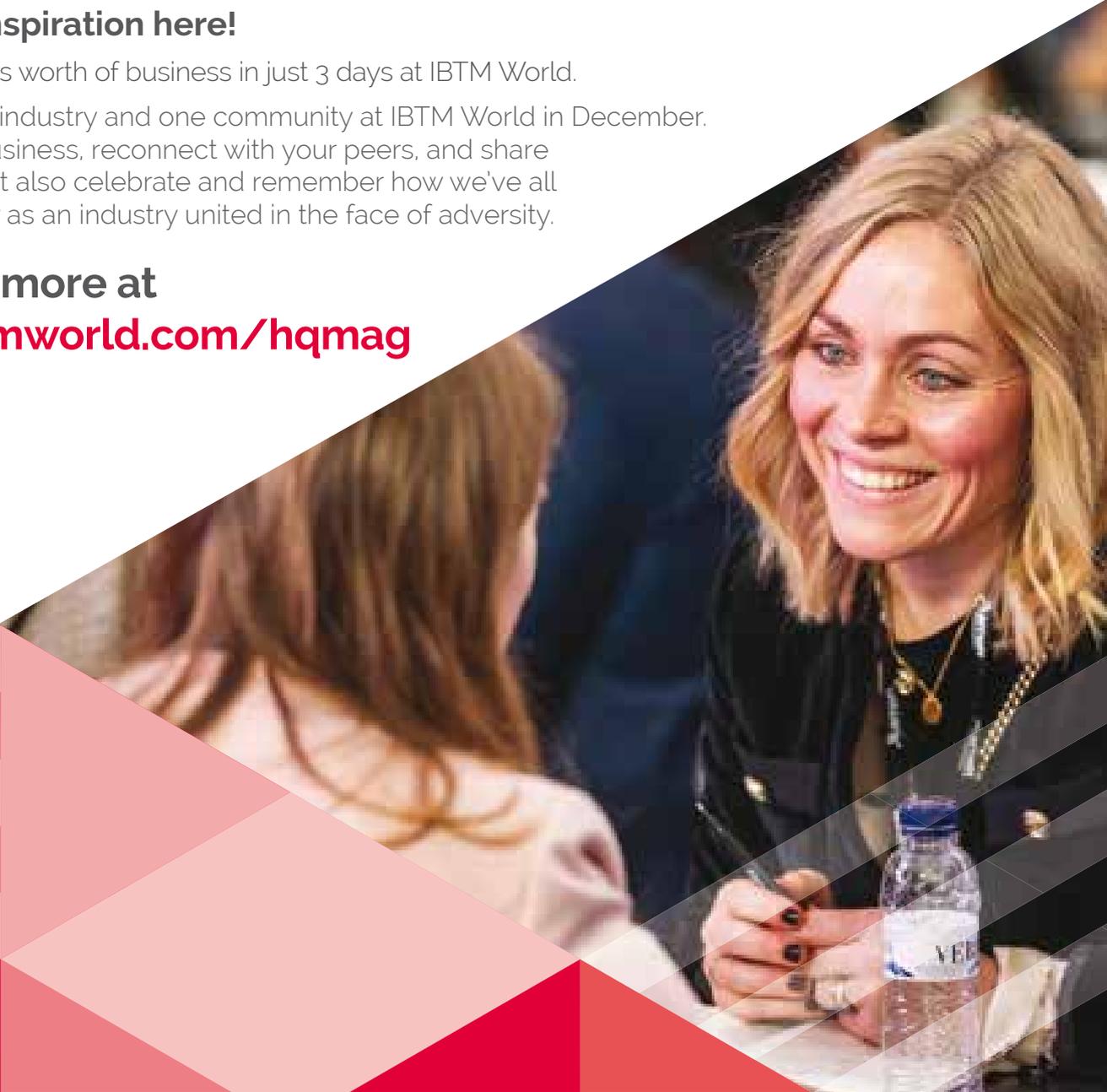
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