

# *Face to Face*

*40 years of history, a lifetime of experience*

Tips and tactics for successful face to face meetings and business events



# *Our next event could be yours*

Leaders in the management  
of conferences, exhibitions,  
corporate communications  
and special events.

Contact Bryan Holliday on  
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# Introduction



There will always be a need to meet. As social animals we like to congregate with our peers to be inspired, educated and informed. Over 70% of overseas delegates who visit our shores confirm that it's the destination and the opportunity to network that motivates them to attend a conference. They acknowledge that the information presented in the scientific or business programme could just as easily be distributed via the Internet.

The essence of the planning and staging of a successful meeting is, and always will be, the application of sound management techniques and procedures. Our tools of trade may change and become more sophisticated but the human qualities and core values required to harness them are perhaps more important today than they've ever been.

We are very proud of the fact that our founding company was the first PCO to be established in Australia. Today, there are over 700 nationwide. Clients say that our expertise provides a standard of conference organisation that is equal to any in the world.

In my 20 year association with the company, I've had the privilege of working with some extraordinarily talented people. Each and every one of them has made an enormous contribution to the growth and development of the business. I've

chosen 12 people to acknowledge here. They include former owners, senior staff past and present and trusted suppliers. In alphabetical order they are: Pauline Beckton, Ngarita Bishop, Emma Bowyer, Albina Bradford, Miles Clarke, Val Gowen, John Hardaker, Beverley Parrott, Phil Peterson, Ian Stuart, Mark Wallage and Pamela Wheat.

All the articles in this booklet first appeared in the industry magazine Mice.net and were written by me. The photographs are from events we've managed and produced over the years.

I'm very proud of our company's history and tradition. Every day we strive to build on our wonderful foundation. I hope that you enjoy reading this commemorative booklet.

*Bryan Holliday  
Managing Director*



# *Added Value*

The Spanish artist Pablo Picasso was once asked if he could draw a small picture while sitting in a café. The great man made some squiggles on a napkin and handed it over, with the observation it could be bought for \$10,000.

When it was pointed out that he'd taken no more than a few seconds to complete the request he dryly observed: "Yes, and it took me 40 years' of painting to get to this point".

There is still a perception in corporate Australia that meeting and event management requires little more than booking a venue, selecting a speaker, sending out invitations and turning up on the day.

In some instances, an event can be managed in-house but when the corporate image of an organisation is at stake, contracting the services of a professional simply adds up. It's a bit like getting a haircut: you could hand over

the scissors to your nearest and dearest and you may get a satisfactory result but it's an option fraught with danger.

The internet has made venue selection, accommodation and related services somewhat easier to access but this by no means is the complete picture. The professional event planner is an important source of added value which should be thoroughly canvassed when an appointment is being considered.

There are instances where the event planner has greater buying power than the client through sheer booking volume but the real value lies in how that event planner can use the venue to ensure the company's strategic objectives can best be realised. The event planner's contribution should be viewed as an investment to ensure a positive outcome and companies briefing an event planner should ask what creative input would come with the appointment.

Another important issue to consider is the effective use of technology to plan and manage your event. The days when a conference or similar business event could be planned using just Excel are long gone: event planners use customised and often web-enabled technology that allows the smooth management of attendees, speakers, flights, accommodation, exhibitions, social functions, meals, transfers, financials and the many other details that the attendees come to expect from a function.

Australian event planners are at the forefront of event management technology and put in place policies, protocols and procedures that ensure accurate reporting throughout the life of the event. Effective communication is the goal of any business event and it's essential that the information that is its lifeblood is effectively and judiciously managed.





## Top 20 High Cs

*Creativity* – should underpin every event

*Challenge* – the key feature of doing business today

*Collaboration* – an essential element of event management

*Clients* – give them every reason to use your services next time

*Competition* – all the more reason to be creative

*Communication* – the lifeblood of your business, internal and external

*Commitment* – use yours to boost those of your stakeholders

*Community* – be a part of it

*Commerce* – keep your eye on the bottom line at all times

*Career* – everything a job is not

*Capability* – yours will inspire others

*Conferences* – everything must be geared to get your clients' message across clearly

*Change* – make it a friend, but don't do it just for the sake of it

*Customisation* – ensure each event has its own unique flavour

*Contribution* – create a working environment where contribution is valued and recognised

*Class* – stamp it on everything you do

*Culture* – recognise its unique impact on your events

*Contact* – the underpinning of the events business

*Choice* – recognise this is a prerogative of your clients and respond accordingly

*Connectivity* is a silly little word that deserves banishment



# Keep Your Message on Song

As anyone who runs a business knows, it's always more cost effective to grow your business with an existing client than to find a new one.

Many organisations utilise the services of event management companies for specific projects, be they conference management, corporate hospitality, ceremonial occasions or product launches.

Event managers, however, are well placed to provide added value by way of a significant range of communications services. It's all about understanding the nature of the business of the client and ensuring their communications, internal and external are completely on song with the organisation's overall aims and objectives.

A communications audit is a good place to start:

- Is the company or association projecting a coherent and consistent message?
- Does the office stationery reflect the organisation's image?
- How up to date is the sales collateral – on paper and online?
- Are the staff uniforms and grooming up to standard?
- Is the company's message consistent from one event to the next?
- Is their corporate hospitality budget being well spent?
- Are their means of motivating and enthusing their staff cost effective?
- How do in-house events like Christmas parties assist with their overall objectives?

- With what frequency do they communicate with clients, past, present and potential?

- How do they communicate and acknowledge their staff when they're working under pressure?

There is no reason why a conference/ event management company couldn't provide a consultancy service to address many of these issues for their clients. The aim of every business event is to enhance the quality of communication between all parties and perhaps we should do more in terms of offering our expertise in this area.

If nothing else, we should be ensuring our own communications processes meet these standards.



# *It's Conference Party Time!*

The party is a key component of any conference and its planning and delivery needs every bit as much attention as the business or scientific program itself.

The trend is for more informal occasions where delegates have the chance to freely circulate, where formalities are kept to a minimum and where a variety of experiences are on offer.

It is important to look at the history of the event to establish the style and substance of that meeting's conference party. While most Australian convention centres can manage large sit-down dinners, for groups over the 800 delegate mark, a walk-around conference party is recommended.

The theme of the party should be determined in the main by the composition of the delegates. Where there are many international delegates in Australia for the first time, an Australiana

night is always appreciated, with sheep shearing, aboriginal dance, native animals, surf lifesavers and bush bands providing the movement and colour.

Close consideration has to be made of the sensibilities of the delegates – while many Australians are happy to walk around eating, there are others – particularly Europeans – who prefer to use a knife and fork at all times. A spread of food stations around the venue is recommended over large buffet spreads. Dietary requirements should be catered for in the registration documents.

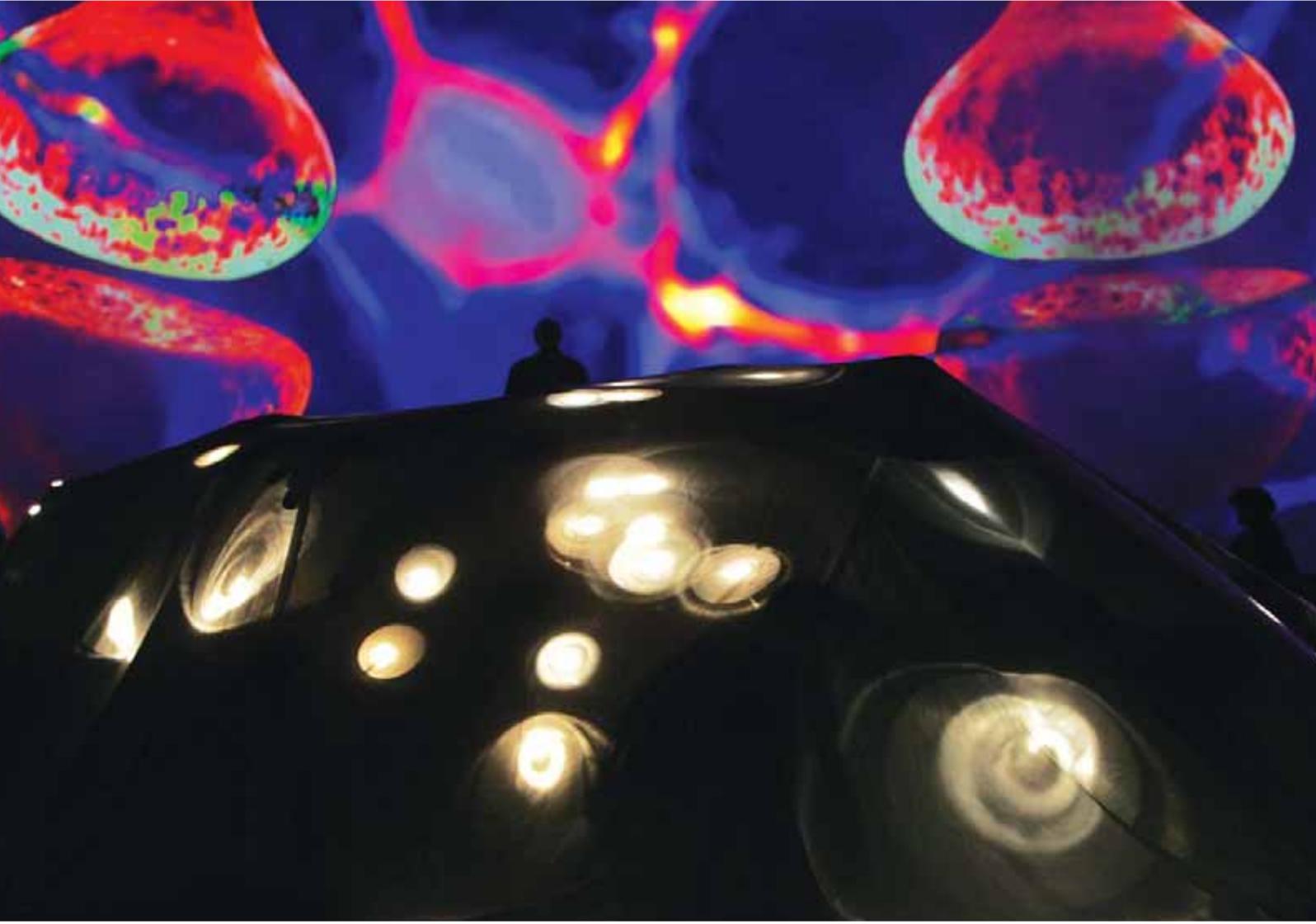
Seating needs to be provided for at least half the delegates, as well as tall bar tables where guests can eat and drink in comfort. Consideration has to be made with regard to salads, which can be difficult to consume standing up.

For larger conferences where there is a wide spectrum of ages among the delegates, it is useful to have several

entertainment areas where delegates can either party hard or simply chat over a quiet liqueur and coffee.

It is important to ensure the ratio of guests to wait staff is correct, especially at the start of the party when drinks are being served. If budgets permit, some “mocktails” are a welcome choice for non-alcohol drinkers who invariably have just the options mineral water and fruit juice.

Conferences are quite intensive affairs, with meetings often starting at breakfast time, so transport for delegates who wish to have an early night or who are feeling the effects of jetlag, should be available within 90 minutes of the start of the party. It might also be helpful to alert the host city's taxi services that the event is underway as well as also having the information at hand with regard to clubs and late closing bars for the night-owls among the delegates.



# *Harnessing Creativity*

There's few industries where service sets an organisation apart like airlines.

Virtually every commercial flight anywhere in the world is identical in terms of its basic experience – settling in, safety announcements, inflight service, entertainment, landing and exit. Most perceptions are determined by the attitude and service provided by the flight attendants. These usually range from sublime to “flight from hell”.

Like the airlines, the meeting and events sector's success levels are also determined through adherence to service standards. What sets a company apart is not its ability to deliver its promised package, but the creativity and level of engagement of its staff in the delivery.

Service, like manufactured goods, is a commodity in the sense that policies and procedures are in place to deliver a reliable and consistent outcome. This is

not enough. Like that flight attendant who will go the extra mile to make your trip special, the event planner needs to draw on the creativity and passion within their organisation to set the event apart.

With communications the basic aim of every conference, the event planner can do much more than simply make sure it happens smoothly on the day by developing an understanding of the client's world.

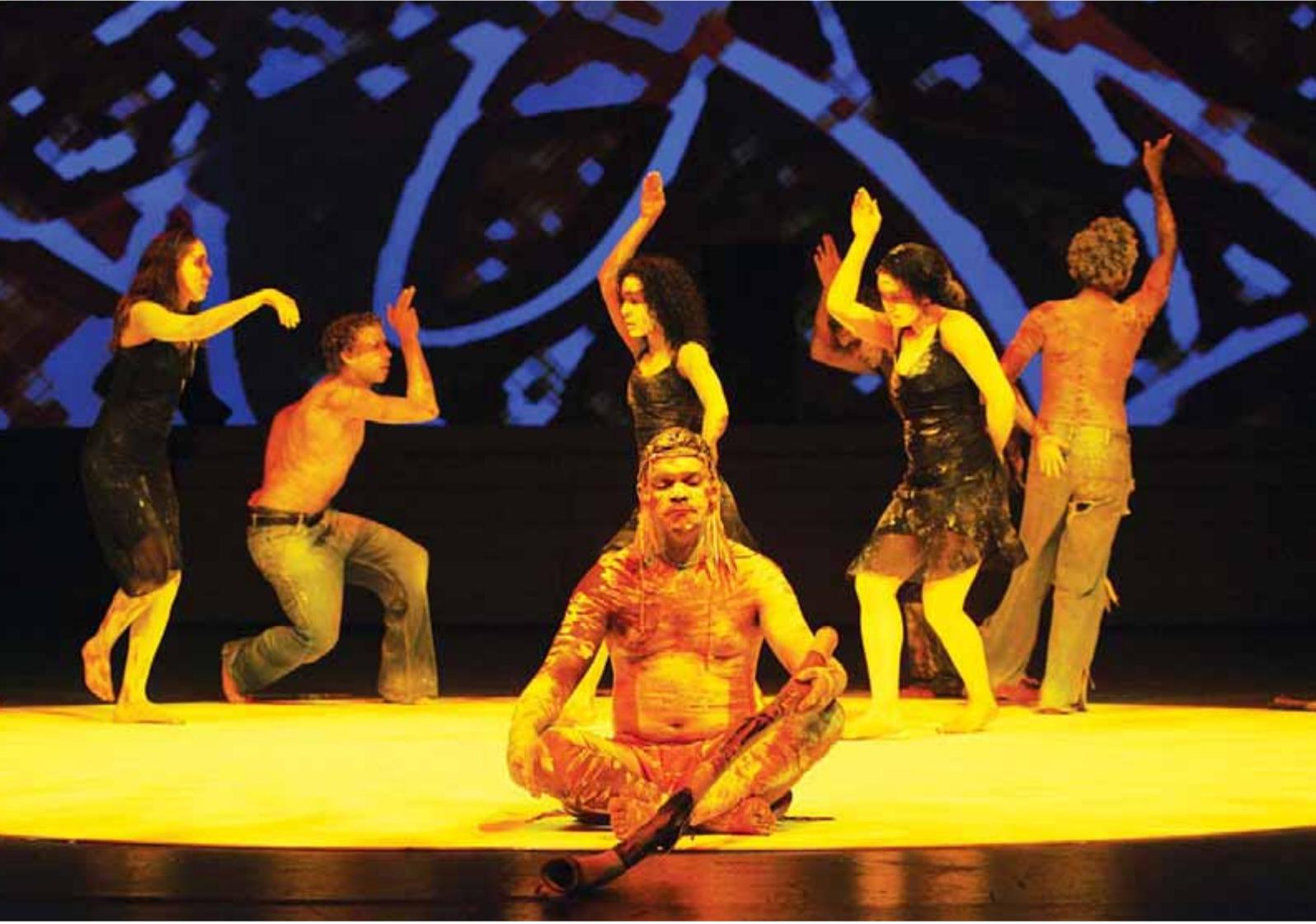
While no one expects the event planner to know everything about the client's organisation, it is more a matter of gaining an understanding of the communication processes and ensuring the key messages are delivered in the clearest possible way.

This goes way beyond having a public address system that works properly. People learn differently, so the choice of MC, the structure of the tea and coffee breaks, the role of the after-dinner

speaker or motivational speaker all have significant impact on the end result.

Some years ago, we dressed an eminent scientist in a toga and had him make his entrance to the conference dinner in a chariot. A simple bit of fun, it had a profound effect on the culture of that conference and significantly helped strengthen an international organisation. On another occasion, the clients drew all their talent from their own ranks to deliver an emotive and memorable opening ceremony.

To draw from the creative pool within your organisation, you have to discover what's there and a monthly exercise to review past projects and plan future ones is an ideal opportunity to tap into the creative juices which may be hidden.



# *Tuned In To Your Delegates*

Industry leaders and corporate executives tend to play senior roles in their professional associations and play an important role in charting the activities and direction of the organisations.

As such, they have an influential role in determining the substance and style of meetings – be they corporate or annual association gatherings. Care has to be taken in the development of the program and in the way that is relevant and interesting to all delegates – and this often means the large body of attendees who might be two or three decades younger than most of the organisers.

All associations need new blood and with conferences usually being the peak event in the annual calendar, it is vital that the program, its marketing and presentation has appeal across all age and knowledge demographics to ensure interest is sparked to attend for years to come.

The walk-in music, the choice of MC, the signage, presentation technology, keynote speaker, lifestyle speaker and the degree to which newcomers are welcomed all play important parts in the way in which the organisation is perceived by the delegates.

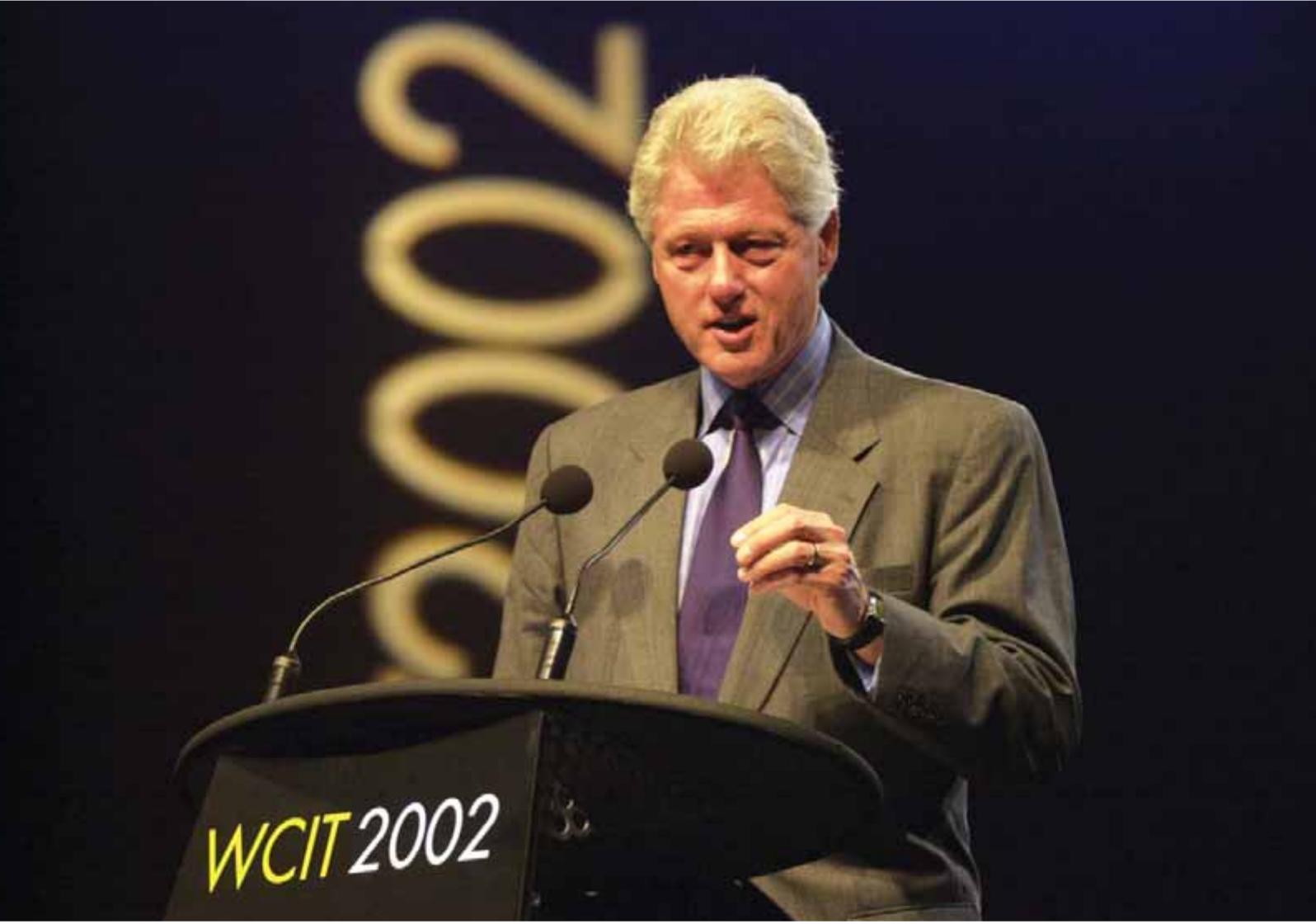
Even the way the conference is marketed makes a difference. The development of the online environment means potential delegates can be brought into the loop through e-newsletters which are inexpensive to produce and update. The ubiquitous text messaging technology, which is so popular among the owners of mobile phones, can be used to remind delegates to register and of some of the events they can look forward to at the conference.

The peripheral activities are equally important to the successful outcome. The social program needs to be balanced to appeal to all ages and

interests. If there is a tradition for a formal dinner, arrangements need to be in place for a nightclub or after-dinner venue to offer a complete change of pace. Perhaps it's time to rethink the formal dinner if the age demographic of the delegates has changed to such an extent that the majority might prefer a completely different way to celebrate.

Menus which might have been adequate for years also need to reflect changing tastes and the multi-cultural nature of Australian society and contain alternative dishes to the standard Anglo Saxon banquet fare.

Audience response systems are an important means of gauging how much delegates are learning from a presentation and also provide feedback to presenters. They can also be highly effective for evaluating the conference, its business program and social events.

A photograph of Bill Clinton speaking at a podium. He is wearing a grey suit, a light blue shirt, and a purple tie. He has his right hand raised near his chest. The podium is black with two microphones. The text "WCIT 2002" is visible on the podium and in the background.

WCIT 2002

## *Select Attitude Over Skills*

Event management has become a popular career choice for many young people in the wake of the high profile events that stud the calendar – be they sporting, cultural, commercial or academic.

Rather than being merely a by-product of marketing studies, it's encouraging to see that some of the leading tertiary institutions offering event management modules are including opportunities for students to work in the “real” world of event management companies.

This sector does have a “glamour factor” and it's a good thing for would-be entrants to realise the business can be stimulating and personally very fulfilling, but these rewards invariably come with the cost of hard work, pressure and intense attention to detail.

Savvy employers hire on attitude and take the responsibility to train the skill-sets required for this business. Good interpersonal skills, a pleasant demeanour, independence, writing ability and a willingness to work in a team are qualities that universities and TAFE colleges are ill-equipped to impart.

The events business can be gruelling at times but enlightened companies ensure ongoing training, participation in industry forums, professional development seminars and performance appraisals are integral to the operation of the enterprise. It's insufficient simply to declare that a career path exists.

Education should also be a two way street. Conference professionals who may have several decades in the business sometimes believe they are the font of all knowledge. The reality is there is a lot they can learn from the relative newcomers to the industry, if they care to listen.

The needs of successive generations of delegates at conferences clearly change over time – of which the elders of the organising committee might be quite oblivious. Conference company staff who are attuned to the dynamic within the client's organisation should have the confidence to raise concerns.

While there are fears that our tertiary institutions are becoming obsessed with their commercial needs at the cost of their academic imperatives, the vocational opportunities now available are the best investments possible if the events sector is to meet its full potential.



## *We're All Leaders Now*

The great benefit of advancing technology is that much routine data processing has been automated.

For instance, accommodation, transfers, speakers and accounts all feed into and out of a central database, with virtually no duplication of input.

Conferences and their associated live events by their very nature require a high degree of teamwork. This may range from involving a handful of suppliers in the case of a business conference in a city hotel or several hundred when turning on a party for 5,000 delegates to an international medical conference.

It's essential that everyone has a sense of "ownership" and commitment to the task

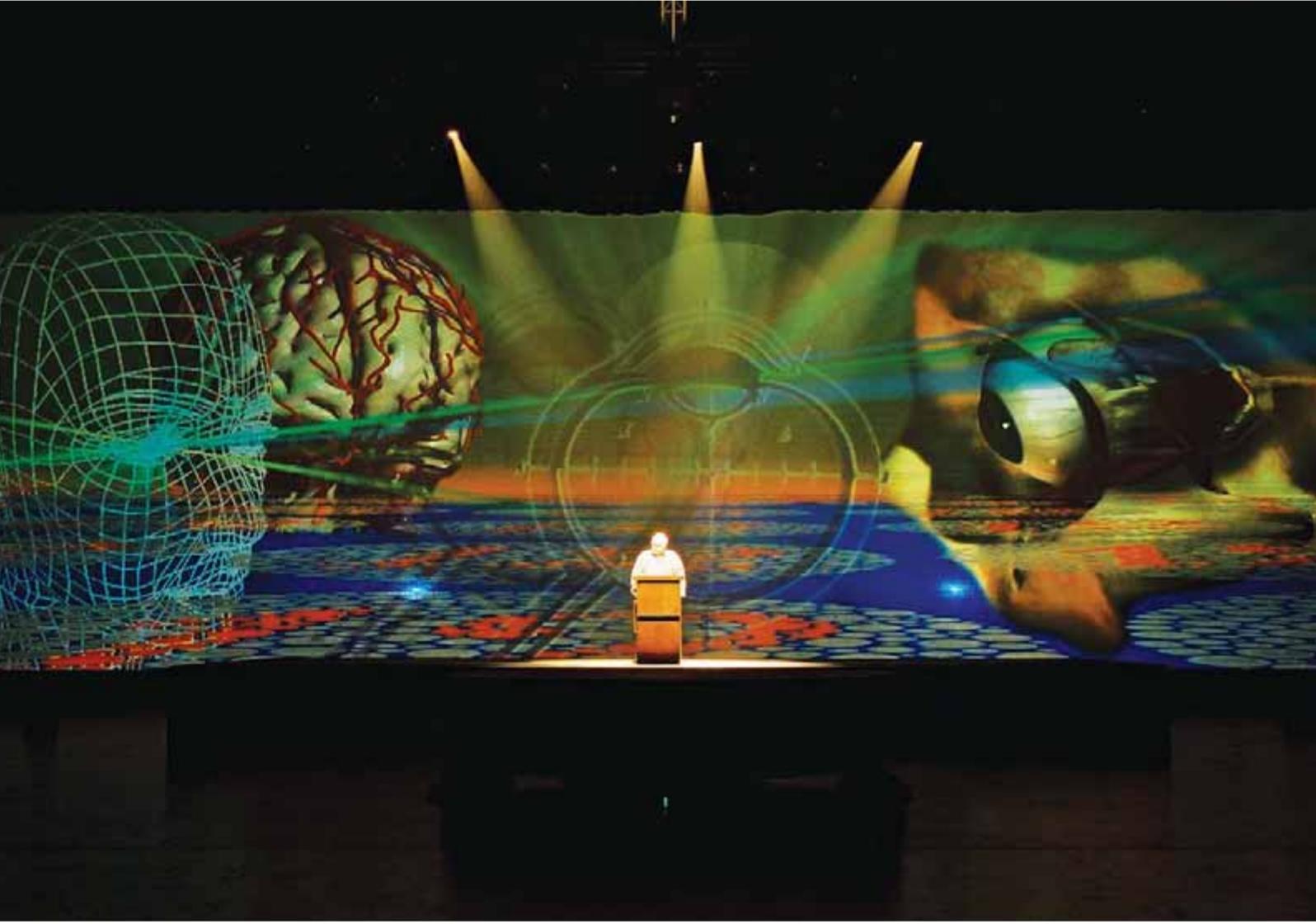
to which they're assigned. It may be helping delegates on and off their sunset cruise or eating fire at the congress party – there is no doubt that guests can instantly detect if the service or entertainment they are experiencing is being delivered with enthusiasm and warmth.

There are hundreds upon hundreds of elements that determine the success or otherwise of a conference, but the one key aspect that has to be delivered perfectly every time is attitude. If the attitude exudes "ownership" and willingness to show leadership if required, the challenge to the event organiser is met.

Event managers sometimes find themselves in regional or remote locations and relying more than usual on the services of suppliers who might only be required to do their allotted task once or twice a year. The challenge then is for the person with overall responsibility for

delivery of the event to build up good lines of communication and engender a sense of ownership.

Leadership qualities are often best displayed when the unforeseen occurs or there are events beyond the control of the organisers. These are part and parcel of the nature of our enterprise and it's how these challenges are handled and the attitude displayed that will determine the dominant perception of the event on the part of the client.





## *Online Auctions Not the Way*

A recent online auction by a pharmaceutical giant had conference and event organisers bidding against one another to supply various services for its meetings business.

At a time when procurement procedures are being revised across the business landscape, this is an attempt to change the relationship between organiser and client – to consider price as the sole determinant as to whether a service can be provided.

The efficient planning and delivery of meetings and events requires much more subtlety than simply price competition. Relationships are developed and nurtured over years which have a significant impact on the “culture” around which a company organises and delivers its live events – be they seminars, product launches or corporate meetings.

These services cannot be simply “bundled” into a price point that can be bid for on an online auction. The people proposing and promoting this concept have lost sight of the dynamic of face to face communication.

Meetings and live events are “windows” into the culture and management style of corporations large and small and it is important that the meeting organiser tailors those events to reflect a consistent message and image. By straitjacketing themselves into a service regime that is predetermined by way of an anonymous online auction, the company loses out on the creativity and flair that might significantly enhance their event.

Event services are not like a consumer product on a supermarket shelf. Aspects such as corporate memory, intuition and track record are every bit as important as price when it comes to contracting an event planner.



# *Meetings in an Online World*

The past decade has seen the transformation of the business of meetings and events.

I remember striking the “Enter” key which launched the (then) Meetings Industry Association of Australia website, little knowing what a juggernaut the internet would become in all our lives.

That was Hobart in 1996 and despite the online world having invaded every aspect of our industry, the way we talk to our clients, their delegates, our suppliers and our staff, the basic premise for people coming together at meetings remains unchanged.

As that inspirational Australian of the Year, Dr Fiona Wood, told the MEA conference in Perth, she gets her best information at conferences. It's the flow of ideas that's irreplaceable and why people will continue to register in the expectation they will gain something from the meeting that the juggernaut

that is the World Wide Web is still unable to deliver.

This is not to assume that simply by staging a meeting you can reach serendipity with everyone attending. Indeed the onus to deliver an event that justifies the registration fee is even more pressing as potential delegates are secure in the knowledge they can access the information one way or another within days, if not minutes, of it being delivered.

As businesspeople it is also our responsibility to ensure that our clients have the most cost-effective event possible without diminishing the quality of the communication. The online access has eliminated the need to post weighty documents worldwide and we should be looking to reduce the output of registration brochures and other printed material, for cost and sustainability considerations.

We shouldn't view this as a threat to our profit margins, but rather evidence that we're using the technology at our disposal responsibly. The reality is that if we aren't prepared to innovate, our competitors certainly will.

Recently the Sydney Convention & Exhibition Centre invited a cross section of its clients to view some of the developments that had taken place in recent times and to unveil some new ones. The information imparted could have taken up two pages on an emailed press release, but it was the way in which the 250 guests were entertained and informed that saw more than 40 firm bookings flow in as a direct result. The Centre now offers wireless internet, menus fully costed online, intelligent lighting and a range of other benefits but at the end of the day it was the innovative and technically flawless way they staged the event that secured them that fresh business.

# making connections

NSW Premier's Forum on Spinal Cord Injury & Conditions

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# *Meetings Should Build Legacies*

No one who attended the Spinal Injury conference in Sydney early last year is ever likely to forget the impact that the late Christopher Reeve had on the event.

Unable to breathe unassisted and with movement only from his neck upwards, Reeve spoke with courage and eloquence, giving hope and rare understanding to the many delegates in the audience with spinal injuries.

If there was ever a case for the value of the meeting, this was it. Meetings that are well conceived, organised and managed can leave a legacy that goes long past the take-off of the final aircraft taking the delegates home.

Case in point: A daylong company conference by a Taiwanese insurance company at the Sydney Opera House is topped off with a series of awards being presented, the video rolls of the top performer talking about his work

and attitude to it. To a standing ovation, this middle-aged man brings his mother on stage to acknowledge her part in his success.

This might not be the way things are done in Australia, but the principle is the same. The meeting is where past achievements are recognised, future strategy is outlined and where people are motivated to deliver – be it in stem cell research in the case of the spinal conference or the promotion of life insurance products at the other.

The common thread for all meetings is the quality of the communication. How the message of the organiser or promoter can make its way through the barrage of competitive information. It has been estimated that the average city dweller receives about 2,500 different messages in one form or another by the time they start work every day – this includes all the different product brands one encounters from the moment one awakes.

If meetings are to provide the information, education, motivation and reward, the organisers and event managers need to look closely at the points where interference can take the event off track. Transport arrangements are especially prone to delays. The failure of a single coach to arrive at a designated place and time can trigger a cascade of complaint that can threaten the overall success of the event. Contingency planning must take account of any difficulties of this nature and the disruption to the delegates' schedule acknowledged.

A successful meeting leaves much more than simply knowledge extended about a particular topic. It leaves a legacy in a host destination in many ways, benefits that can flow for many years though investment decisions, incremental tourism and goodwill generated.



# *Rethinking Relationships*

A new year is as good a reason as any to consider your business relationships and how you can best use them to further your corporate objectives or those of your professional association.

There are occasions when a client wants little more from their event planner than a purely organisational service – ensuring venue is booked, flights, hotels and transfers arranged.

This is a core activity for the event planner but there is much more strategic counselling and management consultancy a professional conference organiser can bring to the table. It's an often untapped resource and one that companies and associations should bear in mind when appointing an event planner.

Remember, this is a relationship that may stretch over many years. Event planners often bring many years' experience of working with organising committees, marketing at a sophisticated level and plenty of tactical thinking to the situation. There are many different financial models which can be used for event management and how these are applied can significantly impact on the outcome.

The golden rule that "he who has the gold makes the rule" always applies, it is important that clients recognise that while they may be experts in their particular field it is most unlikely they will have had the same level of experience in event management as the people they appoint to the task.

We also have the situation where association conferences often combine the enthusiasm of unpaid volunteers and professional event planners and

managers and it is the role of the chairperson to set policy and action plans and ensure that they are adhered to.

You will have checked out the track record, competence and reputation of your event planner when you appointed them. They are an important resource and their input on a range of matters may be invaluable – if they are given space to make it.



# *Food For Thought*

There is no single item more likely to influence a delegate's opinion of the success or otherwise of a meeting than the quality and service of food and beverage.

The truism that "what you eat today walks and talks tomorrow" is especially applicable to conferences where delegates might be battling the disorientation of jetlag and well out of their comfort zones in an unfamiliar city.

The expectation that delegates will be content with "rubber chicken" served en masse is quite misplaced and the design and management of the meals, cocktail parties, formal congress dinners and casual parties require the same level of scrutiny and expertise in planning as the business program itself.

There is a definite trend away from liquor being served at lunch, with many organisations opting for picnic boxes containing light and tasty wraps, fresh fruit and fresh local breads. The picnic boxes also allow delegates to move around freely and are frequently provided in the exhibition area only, ensuring maximum delegate traffic past the exhibition stands.

The demand for vegetarian food continues to climb and non meat canapés at welcome receptions comprise around 30 per cent of the food on offer. One has to take care that the food is no bigger than one or two bites and is sufficiently robust to being handled by people who are standing up and often juggling a wine glass. Shot glasses and miniature cups containing tasty and aromatic soups are a popular recent addition to welcome reception menus.

The practice of serving alternate dishes at more formal dinners should be discouraged. It always has the result of guests wanting to swap dishes and others being disappointed that their dining companion on either side has a dish they desire. Having a mezze platter to be passed around the table can be an icebreaker for delegates who might not know one another.

It is also a good idea to have a dessert buffet as by that time of the night people often appreciate an opportunity to network. They might be dancing and uneaten plates of melting desserts detract from the look of the room. It's easy to cater for all tastes including providing fresh fruit and cheese platters for the non-sweet eaters. It also reduces wastage significantly as well as the cost of individually plating the dessert dishes.



## *Time-honoured Rituals*

A little more than 15 years ago if a conference organiser needed to get a document to a supplier or delegate it went by Australia Post or a courier.

Then along came this extraordinary piece of equipment – the fax machine. We thought this was indeed a quantum leap in the way we did business. Here we could send a letter, yet still keep it!

It cost us well over a thousand dollars, but it was money well spent. Then it was the turn of the CD Rom and floppy disk, which had the capacity to hold on a sliver of metal enough information that would have filled a thick wad of paper.

The online world took hold of our industry around seven years ago, with email providing even faster communication all around the world and at a fraction of the cost of “snailmail” and the fax.

The past two decades have seen more change in communications than the entire period from the invention of the Gutenberg Press in 1436. One can only wonder what’s in store seven years from now and how “quaint” our current forms of communications will seem then. You don’t see a lot of carousels with slides for presentations at conferences any more, to say nothing about mailing abstracts for evaluation.

The only certainty in our business is that people will still need to come together to carry out all the time-honoured rituals of their associations. Through formal and informal presentations and dialogue further the cause of their common interests. Internal politics will dog these organisations every bit as much as they do today.

Another certainty is that event planners, managers and their clients will rely on trust and reliability to see their ventures

through. In the main Australia has people of integrity running its conferences and events. There is stiff competition but a realisation that a reputation can take a lifetime to attain and only a minute to lose.

The live events sector has matured significantly in recent times in Australia. We have excellent facilities to offer and increasingly the business of events is being recognised as a dynamic career choice. Provided we never lose sight of these fundamental values, the future is indeed bright.



XVIIIth World Congress  
of Neurology

# *Centres of Excellence*

Australia's convention centres have been under the spotlight of late, bringing attention to the overall high standard of venues in Australia.

The opening of the Perth Convention Exhibition Centre now has every Australian state with a world class customised venue to promote domestically and overseas. This is quite an achievement when one considers that London and New York, for instance, cannot boast convention centres of the quality of Australia's.

The Gold Coast also now has a first class venue located next to Conrad Jupiters, bringing to three the purpose built centres in Queensland. Brisbane's centre won the Meeting Venue – More than 500 Delegates Award from the Meetings Industry Association of Australia (MIAA) and was rated third in an independent international survey by the International Association of

Congress Centres (AIPC). The first spot went to Cairns Convention Centre, proof positive that our centres are up with the best of them, and setting the pace.

This is no mean achievement and we're very aware that these venues comprise so much more than mere bricks and mortar. Cheerful, efficient staff creates cheerful, productive delegates and ultimately successful meetings. One cannot over-estimate the part a positive attitude and training has to play in the events business.

Look around the various convention centres of Australia and a striking feature is that, without exception, their chief executives and senior personnel have far longer than average time in their positions. These are significant enterprises, generating many millions of dollars annually and deserve expert stewardship.

Recently a team from ICMS Australasia returned from a conference commenting that the convention centre staff had been so proactive in anticipating their requirements, the entire event had simply gone swimmingly. Our clients expressed great appreciation for the service we'd provided, a win-win situation for everyone.

A number of city hotels around the country are undergoing significant upgrades of their meeting facilities and communications systems. They realise that they cannot trade on past glory and that the client's expectations are high.

Membership of MEA brings the opportunity to participate in its professional development programs and gain accreditation – a peer review process that is gaining increased recognition around the country. It can only help service standards.



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Affairs



# *Delegate Boosting in Uncertain Times*

The shift in world conflict from conventional warfare has created an insidious climate of unease due to the threat of terrorism and poses new challenges for meeting planners faced with the task of organising international and regional events.

In most cases, it is the perception of danger or delay due to increased security that is dampening enthusiasm rather than any overt threat and organising committees need to take this into account when developing their marketing plans.

Simply sending a pile of registration brochures to the local committee in a particular country and hoping that they will distribute them to the membership is patently insufficient when there are significant disincentives to travel.

For countries that traditionally deliver good numbers of delegates, the formation of a sub-committee for marketing is recommended. Delegates

who have a history of travelling are less likely to be intimidated and the added effort in securing their participation may well be reflected positively on the conference bottom line.

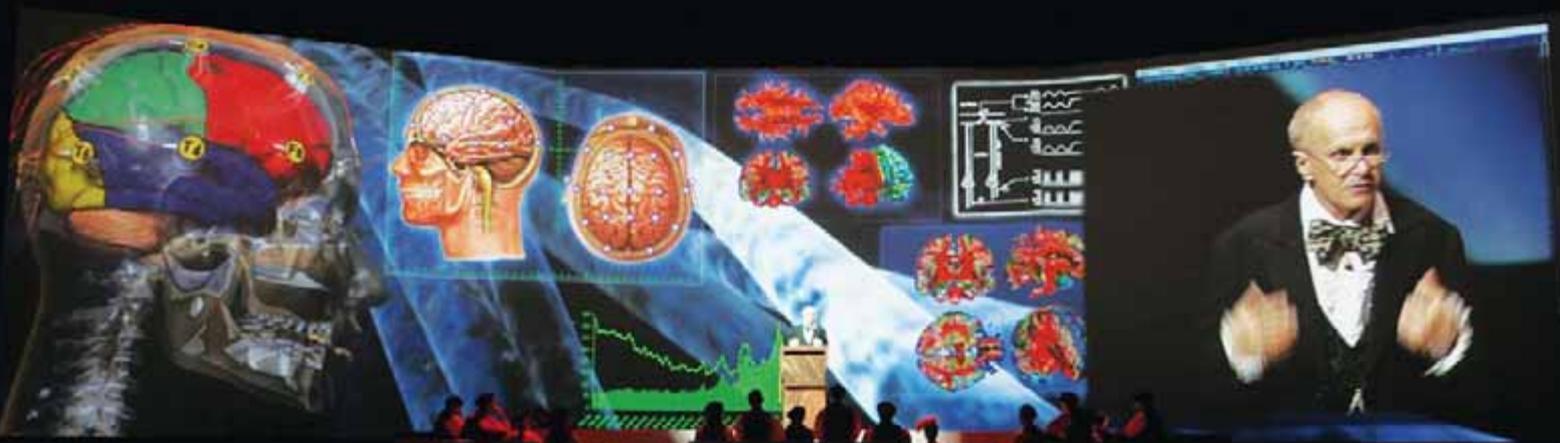
The internet provides an inexpensive and immediate marketing opportunity and the avenues it provides need to be diligently worked. Any inquiries generated through the website should be followed up and communication via email should continue after registration – perhaps in the form of a “countdown” to the conference and snippets of news about the business, scientific, social or touring program. This has the potential to “virus” market the event through recommendations from already signed up delegates to their friends as well as “upselling” the various revenue-generating elements of the event.

Exhibitors also need to have a sense of “ownership” about the meeting and should be encouraged at every

opportunity to help build enthusiasm about the event with their client base. Ongoing communication with exhibitors on marketing matters is essential throughout the lead up to the event. If exhibitors are confident about the trade exhibition, this enthusiasm will find its way through to their clients.

The cost of registration is a relatively minor element in the decision-making process of delegates and it behoves the organiser to ensure the business and social programs are of such a calibre they provide a powerful inducement to any would-be delegate.

The reluctance of some to travel long haul to international meetings provides the incentive for the development of strong national and regional meetings and it is the responsibility of association executives, corporate meeting planners, destinations and venue operators to make their events irresistible to the wavering delegate.



# Leg Up with Education

Along with the virtual disappearance of the “job for life” the nature of work requires education to be a lifelong moving feast.

The move for Meetings & Events Australia to become a Registered Training Organisation is a logical progression as education is the core function of the association.

Event management has become a career choice in its own right in the wake of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. Universities and Colleges of TAFE now recognise that the planning and management of live events such as conferences, exhibitions and corporate meetings require a range of specialist skills.

The implementation of the Diploma of Event Management is a major step forward for our industry.

Meeting and event companies, however, cannot rely on tertiary education

organisations to deliver all the skillsets required for the job.

This initiative will see MEA as a Private Training Provider delivering nationally recognised qualifications, or units of competency, that must be recognised by counterpart TAFE colleges and other private training providers around the country.

Our company is dedicated to further developing the skills of our team through an intensive in-house professional development program. Among the sessions are topics such as:

- Preferred ways of working
- Time management
- Communication skills
- Business development and creativity
- IT, design and special events
- Exhibitions and sponsorship

The nature of the events industry is that staff go from one project to the next to the next and seldom find time to debrief,

let alone analyse what worked and what didn't. It's so important to work on our business as in our business.

It's most gratifying to observe that many of our younger staffers have the reasonable expectation that their employer will provide the necessary formal education to ensure they remain competitive in an industry notable for the constant innovation that characterises the event management sector.

The power of well organised events to impact the emotions was never more obvious than the recent State Memorial Service for media mogul Kerry Packer at the Sydney Opera House.

Large screen projection of scenes from Packer's life, the supply of flags and banners to schoolchildren, the outfits of the choirs, and the singing of *Waltzing Matilda* by a schoolboy were all elements of an exceptionally well conceived and delivered production.



# Competition

**C**ompetition for market share. Every day we encounter more ways to communicate. To ensure that the meetings industry remains viable, all practitioners must constantly promote the benefits of face-to-face communication for information transmission, education, motivation and inspiration. In his 1979 book "True Confessions" adman John Singleton used the following story to illustrate the relative power of different forms of communication:

"So let's imagine you want to propose to a girl. There are three ways. The best way is to do it in person. No argument. The next best way is to let her see you and hear you – and that's television. The next best way is a toss-up between ringing her up (radio) and writing her a letter (print)."

*Competition by country.* National governments are investing millions of dollars in trying to attract events of all

types to their country. Tourism Australia has belatedly recognised the importance of business events by establishing a special unit to focus on this high-yield sector of the market.

*Competition by city.* When city or state governments invest their scarce resources in custom-built convention centres and other public infrastructure projects, they naturally want to ensure a quantifiable return on investment. With these projects the operative word is investment and not expense. Many demands are made on the public purse but the meetings industry is one of the very few that can return real measurable dollars to the tax payers. Competition is strong with many cities committing millions of dollars to ensure that major events are held in their part of the world.

*Competition by service provider.* The Internet has the capability of directly connecting the client with the supplier.

For meetings managers to remain relevant they must continually improve their productivity and always offer new and improved products and services that can benefit the clients' agreed outcomes. This means that strategic counselling and creativity are assuming far greater importance in the product mix than data processing and technology.

*The future.* Competition will only increase in the future and success will be achieved by the individuals and organisations who can ride the waves and not be drowned by them. Core moral values will remain as important as they always have been and clients will react positively to individuals who act with integrity, compassion and respect for the needs and interests of others.



## *Downunder No More?*

The mindset that Australia is utterly remote from the world's great cradles of civilisation in Europe and North America has been more than 200 years in the making.

A recent observation by the expatriate Australian and former World Bank President John Wolfensohn is an indication that while the geography might not have changed, perceptions certainly have.

He was commenting that the emerging superpowers of China and India are bringing the world focus to south and east Asia, with significant economic implications for Australia.

This may take half a century to fully eventuate, but Australia is already in a strong position to make the most of a changing world order. Where strong economic growth occurs, so too does the requirement for professional associations

and corporate entities to meet and discuss common issues and challenges.

We're only a relatively short flight and few time zones from all the major capitals in south and east Asia, which makes commuting so much more viable. The next generation of wide-body aircraft has the potential to even further slash the cost of travel. Anyone with a bit of savvy can easily spend less on international than local calls using phone cards and voice-over-IP systems such as Skype.

Australia, with its sophisticated meetings industry infrastructure in terms of convention centres and associated service providers, is well placed to help lay the groundwork for the roll out of infrastructure for India and China as well as other countries in the region. Already there is significant evidence that Australian events industry specialists are setting up shop in centres such as Shanghai and Beijing.

A competitive advantage Australia enjoys is that delegates are drawn to meetings in cities where the locals enjoy a good quality of life and critical issues such as air pollution are addressed. Delegates enjoy experiencing a slice of life as it is experienced by the people who live in the environment. Creative cities attract creative people who leave their marks in innumerable ways.

Immense opportunity awaits the new generation of meeting and event planners. Four or five years with a dynamic company in Australia and you're well set to further your experience with a stint in one of these emerging conference destinations.

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