

Headquarters

SEPTEMBER 2023 #111 BUILDING BRIDGES IN THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY



AI Tools - Friends or Foes?

EventMobi

Contemporary Event Management is a Team Sport

Humanitarian Leadership Academy

Learning Without Borders & Breaking Barriers for Humanitarians

Tokyo

City-Tech for a Sustainable Future

HQ Exclusive Report

Queensland Makes Strides Towards Business Events



HOW EVENT TECH IS CHANGING THE WORLD WE LIVE IN





**ALL CONVENTIONS
ARE THE SAME, RIGHT?
REGISTRATION, PROGRAM
FAMILIARISATION AND A
WARM WELCOME
TO COUNTRY
FROM THE WORLD'S OLDEST
CONTINUING CULTURES
AS YOU MEET LOCALS WHO HAPPEN TO BE
WORLD LEADERS
IN HEALTH, TECH, ENERGY
AND AGRIBUSINESS. MAKING YOU REALISE
THE THINKING HERE
IS AS EXPANSIVE AS THE LAND ITSELF.
THERE'S NOTHING LIKE AUSTRALIA.**



Editor's Letter



TICK-TECH

AUTHOR: MARCEL A.M. VISSERS, EDITOR IN CHIEF

Maybe I should have started this text with “Tick-Tech”, but it was summer, and I thought, let me play with names and letters a little. This issue of *HQ* is about technology in the events industry. There is a lot to say about it. For starters, animals can live by instinct but no human being can do without technology. Technology helps humankind to advance, and to prove this, I could cite a thousand examples. “Don’t do it” – I thought to myself – because then then writing would become boring and tedious. Every day, I am tapped on the shoulder (*tick*) by technical (*tech*) gadgets that make my life easier. And this is in all areas and especially in the events industry.

Let me refer again to the old days, when we used to write about technology very piecemeal. Everything went so smoothly: a pat on the back, an embrace, a few sweet words, permanent smiles and fits of laughter. We didn’t need buttons and wires to solve our business problems. And not too long ago, at the **AIPC Annual Conference 2023** in Luxembourg, I was spontaneously addressed by **Heike Mahmoud** from the **Congress Center Hamburg**, where she is **Chief Operating Officer**.

Heike, in my view, is a fine example of a warm personality who keeps the meetings industry at a good human temperature. She asked me if I could also feel that the Tech people are crowding out the Meetings people. Tech people talk about our industry with a different kind of warmth than we older guards are used to. We are more cordial, have a greater group feeling and like being with each other. That is why we are always so happy to meet our kindred spirits again at conferences and events. Yes, Heike, I recognise that feeling, but I also think the time has come for Tech people to experience that as well. It will be a different kind of embrace than the one we are used to. One that seeks liberation. They are going to make our living world bigger, easier and more accessible. That doesn’t necessarily mean it will be more pleasant. The atmosphere and feeling must be created by people themselves. Everyone, in turn, will have to light the fire of wonder for progress. A different kind of warmth for the future!

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*BUILDING BRIDGES
IN THE MEETINGS
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WHY TECHNOLOGY IS THE PERFECT STORM

— AFTER ALL, WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON?

AUTHOR: MANUEL FERNANDES,
HQ MAGAZINE MANAGER

During my time at HQ, talking to event professionals, I've been thinking a lot about this whole human phenomenon of behavioural change and collective transition that is attached to the nature of associations. But is it really like that? Are we really so prone to change due to external factors, or usually more prisoners of the moment and hostages to circumstances? For every expert who tells me that technology will/is revolutionising the way we meet, I come across another who reaffirms that human beings are wired to be together. We all got used to the drill these last three years: waking up and making a pot of coffee, switching on the laptop in pyjama trousers (who hasn't), logging in to that remote conference app and waiting in line for your turn to speak. In fact, the pandemic has forced the entire consumer industry to look for ways to get back in touch and use these larger instruments as a harbinger of what's around the corner... but considering what we see today, that didn't really happen.

According to a survey carried out by our colleagues at *Convene magazine*, more than 60% of organisers are focused on designing safe, live face-to-face experiences in the coming years. This is not only supported by feedback from destination representatives on our pages, but also by various market trends and studies. A new report by *Deloitte* highlights the power of networking as the main reason for the business resurgence, stating that face-to-face events and conferences will drive the recovery of business travel throughout 2023, as employees seek more human connections. Meanwhile, the recovery in business travel is also affecting event technology platforms and contributing to the current recession, with some companies laying off hundreds of

employees and others being resold for prices far below their market value during the pandemic, while organisers are opting for classic event routes.

We have now harnessed the power of the virtual world to maintain contacts and business all year round, but the pessimistic omens about the announced death of in-person events have clearly been exaggerated. If, at first, virtual platforms became essential for the upkeep of meetings, followed by a breakneck development of technological tools and resources, this post-pandemic reboot has completely reversed that trend with associations and event organisers looking for a balance point where digital audiences can join the traditional face-to-face space. As our interviewee in this issue, Bob Vaez from EventMobi tells us: *"What event technology needs is to help organisers work better as a team using these tools. Whereas before there were only one or two administrators in an event management tool, now there are several dealing with different processes in separate rooms. Contemporary event management is a team sport."*

As an association, the amazing thing is that you can draw people who care about a specific issue or cause to come together around an initiative or impact and create that experience personally. This makes it possible to forge very close ties, create networks and share a lot of education. All these event tech tools are here to help you expand your mission and purpose, broaden the scope of action, and innovate in areas where our operations were really rusty. The operative word has always been "complement", never "replace"... and I think that's where many of us fell into the trap that live events had their days numbered.

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AI Tools

– Friends or Foes?

Artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a transformative force across every industry in an age of technological marvels and innovation. Businesses use AI to reshape operations, improve stakeholder interactions, and streamline processes. This edition of *HQ* on Tech & Education explores the world of AI, data privacy, cybersecurity, and the ethical use of these powerful tools.

HQ's editor, Jesús Guerrero Chacón, dives into this unpredictable twilight world.

The AI Race

At the forefront of this AI revolution is ChatGPT, the latest sensation from OpenAI, backed by Microsoft, which has stirred both intrigue and concern around the world since its launch in November 2022. ChatGPT has redefined business strategies in less than a year and captivated businesses and individuals with its speedy responses. Yet not all of the information it provides can be trusted, as shown by some inaccuracies of its answers.

Technology leaders are competing fiercely, releasing increasingly powerful AI products at a fast and furious pace:

- November 2022: OpenAI launched ChatGPT, offering a free and a PRO version.
- May 2023: Microsoft joined forces with OpenAI adding AI to their Bing and Edge search engines.
- July 2023: Google introduced Bard, its own generative AI model, in response to ChatGPT. The same month, Apple reportedly entered the AI arena to challenge its competitors.
- August 2023: ChatGPT Enterprise for businesses was unveiled. The same month, Google launched Duet AI for Google Workspace, promising productivity enhancements.

These tools are continuously adding improved plug-ins to

personalise the user experience. Have you heard about Kayak's virtual travel assistant? It lets you book flights, accommodation, or even rental cars directly through ChatGPT.

The fast pace of change can make us feel overwhelmed as we try to adapt to new ways of working and thinking. We must pay attention to AI's evolution and not ignore its impact. Now is the time to embrace these opportunities to improve our working lives while being cautious of those who wish to take advantage of the general confusion and lack of awareness. But we must be careful when self-proclaimed AI experts promise instant results that will make a business skyrocket in no time.

The Perils of AI

Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines was first released in 2003. This third installment of James Cameron's famous sci-fi action film is about a new Terminator, an advanced AI, who tries to save humanity by preventing the rise of killer machines. It's 2023, and for several years now, we've been living and witnessing scenes that seem to have been taken from sci-fi films. And still, these are all very real, whether it is a global pandemic, wars, political turmoil or armed conflicts in various countries in Europe, Latin America, or Africa, the threat of recession, natural disasters due to climate change, or the rise of AI. We've had to quickly adapt to reacting to several hazards that happened at the same time, and we've had to fight harder than ever for the comeback of face-to-face human interaction.

We've all watched it on the news. The creators of this kind of technology themselves are warning the world about the abuses that can be made of it – Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI, speaking before the US Congress and urging them to put some regulations in place, or Geoffrey Hinton, the so-called godfather of AI, resigning from Google and warning about the threats and dangers to humanity of his own creations. In the US, even Hollywood screenwriters are protesting, fearing job losses and intellectual property issues. The New York Times has warned OpenAI of potential legal action for alleged copyright infringement. It is only natural that there should be calls for legislation to ensure responsible and ethical use as governments struggle to address data misuse and mitigate risks such as fake news, deep fakes and biased information. In Europe, both the temporary ban on ChatGPT by the Italian government and the AI Act adopted by the European Parliament in June 2023 reflect the urgency to address data privacy and ethical concerns, although the final form of this regulation will not be fully effective until 2026. The speed at which technology is advancing, however, is outpacing regulatory measures, leading to calls for swift action.

The Ethical Use

While there are risks associated with AI, including worries about job loss, lawsuits and ethical dilemmas, we can navigate this landscape by adopting responsible practices and regulations. Amidst the doomsday scenarios, it's important to acknowledge that AI can be used responsibly and ethically. We should keep a positive attitude towards AI, because no matter how good the data sets or how well-trained their algorithm is, these tools have limitations. Organisations need to establish clear policies on using AI tools, considering when and how employees can use them. Training in ethical use and internal policies should promote trustworthy AI practices.

Tackling these challenges will require thoughtful action and a commitment to the responsible use of AI by governments, businesses and individuals. Balancing new ideas with ethical standards is an ongoing challenge as AI transforms business strategies. In the meetings industry, could we improve the registration and check-in system? Enhance the delegates' experience at an event? Engage with them before, during, and after a conference without being too intrusive? Or measure the ROI of an event?

The Art of Conversation

Successfully using AI, like ChatGPT, depends on mastering communication skills. The quality of AI responses relies on clear, well-structured instructions that state the expected format, tone, and context (the so-called prompts). Compared to conventional web searches, AI chats enable on-the-spot clarifications and enhancements. We can influence the conversation by asking open questions, requesting analyses, or specifying what to avoid.

The unique insights and personal touch humans bring to their work are priceless. Instead, use them to your advantage to boost your next event or promote your destination to potential new attendees, because you're the one who knows best: the newest venues in town, the mouth-watering smells of local delicacies at a particular food court, the colours of the sky at sunset from the trendiest rooftop bar. It's not about letting the AI tool do the work for you, it's about letting it help you work smarter – only we can provide the style, tone, and personal touch to our events or destinations. Instead of worrying about being replaced by AI, see them as tools for enhancing your creativity.

AI can undeniably improve productivity too, but it should never replace our human assessment. One must never use actual customer, attendee, or employee data, but anonymous data that could be used in the same context to avoid compromising personal or business information. Any output generated should always be monitored, as the results could potentially spread stereotypes and biased messages, depending on the topic and the prompt we used to ask our questions.

The quick development of tech requires individuals, organisations and governments to be proactive. How AI affects our future and the evolution of intellectual property and copyrights relies on balancing innovation with ethics.



The unique insights and personal touch humans bring to their work are priceless. Instead, use them to your advantage to boost your next event or promote your destination to potential new attendees because you're the one who knows best...



In this edition of *HQ*, we report on the **Humanitarian Leadership Academy (HLA)** and its digital learning platform **Kaya**. As **Nwabundo Okoh, Communications & Marketing Specialist at HLA** takes us on a journey into their mission, we explore their diverse learning resources for humanitarians across the globe and their strategic vision for the future, including in-person and hybrid events.



Learning **Without Borders, Breaking Barriers** for Humanitarians

Can you provide an overview of the HLA and its mission to upskill people in the humanitarian sector?

The HLA is a global entity that provides high-quality humanitarian capacity strengthening for the wider humanitarian and development sectors as part of our “shifting the power” agenda.

Our mission is to enable people worldwide to prepare for and respond to crises in their own countries by providing quality learning opportunities.

We do this by providing needs-based support directly to those who need it. Through our full suite of services, we provide face-to-face training, blended learning opportunities and on-demand digital learning through our platform **Kaya**, which is underpinned by research and our contextual expertise.

How was Kaya born? How does your online learning platform cater to its users’ diverse learning needs and skill levels?

Kaya was born out of the need to strengthen the skills of humanitarians globally to directly respond to crises in their localities. The idea was to create an easily accessible platform with content relevant to different contexts and created with or by partners in the humanitarian space. Where face-to-face training may not be possible, access to the internet on a phone, tablet or laptop would allow humanitarians to get a hold of much-needed skills.

Kaya, our digital learning platform, was launched in May 2016 at the **World Humanitarian Summit** in Istanbul. The

same year as the **Grand Bargain** – a unique agreement between donors and humanitarian organisations committed to getting more means into the hands of people in need and improving the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action.

Over 500 learning resources are now available on Kaya in 12 languages at varying levels of expertise. Courses for people who have never been involved in humanitarian action to courses for people who have worked in the sector for many years. Courses are also updated with new information as new processes are introduced to humanitarian action.

Resources range from games, quizzes and assessments to online self-directed courses and pathways, webinars, videos, MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), and blended courses. Kaya users can also find registration for face-to-face workshops and events and so much more available and accessible at the learner’s time/flexibility.

Kaya learners are able to earn and showcase the certificates received from completing courses. Some courses award **HPass** digital badges, our accreditation platform, which learners can add to their LinkedIn profiles. Our certificates and badges help to encourage and motivate humanitarians to accelerate their learning and professional development.

What are the main challenges the HLA faces in providing online learning opportunities to a diverse range of learners, including humanitarians, staff from other organisations seeking humanitarian learning, and refugees, to name a few?

Our challenge is to provide learning resources that are fit for purpose, relevant, contextualised and free of charge so they reach those who need them the most.

The HLA also provides face-to-face training and blended learning covering Asia, East and Southern Africa, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, West and Central Africa and more recently Latin America and the Caribbean. Some of these areas are hard to reach, where travel even for local responders can be challenging due to difficult terrains or insecurity. In addition, there have been challenges in accessing a good Internet connection, as well as language barriers, in which case, although translation services are contracted, there is an opportunity to build resources directly in local languages.

What strategies or tools does your organisation use to ensure accessibility to its e-learning offerings for diverse learners, including those with limited technology or internet connectivity?

We work with our learners and training participants to understand how to make their learning journey as smooth as possible, from offering internet bundles for access to online learning to delivering training as close to the frontline as possible. Gender considerations as well as Diversity, Equity & Inclusion are at the core of everything that we do.

The HLA also works with **Catalyst-IT** and **Totara** to ensure smooth access to Kaya, which is created with an award-winning open-source learning management system that has several innovative customisations to optimise it for humanitarian workers globally, including an offline player, that enables users to download and complete learning in areas of poor connectivity and access to learning.

Kaya has also been recently updated with accessibility features, which include a screen reader helper, a dyslexia-friendly view and much more. We are always looking to improve accessibility on Kaya and we actively promote accessibility with our partners, enhancing the platform to ensure that it meets the needs of our partners and learners. We are currently planning the Kaya roadmap for the next 12 months. We are always mindful that Kaya has to remain

accessible within areas of low or limited bandwidth, so this is a primary consideration when identifying and selecting which technologies we release on the platform.

Looking ahead, what are the HLA’s principal opportunities and future goals in its mission to strengthen people’s skills?

The HLA is a leader in helping to upskill humanitarians around the world. Over 1.2 million humanitarians engage on our social media platforms, and we train thousands of humanitarians in person and across the globe every year, in some of the hardest-to-reach areas.

HLA’s next step is to bring humanitarians across varying global ecosystems together as the future of humanitarianism unfolds. One of the ways we are doing this is through the **Humanitarian Xchange**, a hybrid event taking place on February 20, 2024. The objective is to address the systemic changes that are required to transform the root causes of human suffering, and this requires a different approach with more radical thinking. The event will showcase best practices, shape better outcomes and engage in new conversations.

With the growing trend of hybrid events, how does the HLA envision blending on-site and virtual training opportunities to cater to the needs of humanitarians worldwide?

HLA already provides (and has done so for well over a decade) blended-learning opportunities for humanitarians around the world, from operational to technical training opportunities. We also partner with universities for learning excellence and accessibility.

We thrive to innovate in how we build our training using technology that promotes interactivity without excluding learners who may be struggling with access issues. Our goal is to be truly hybrid, so as not to penalise our virtual learners and provide them with a rich learning experience. We use AI, gamification and microlearning to cater to the needs of humanitarians worldwide.

For more information, please visit kayaconnect.org



"Public affairs remain a people business and tech cannot fully replace a physical meeting"

DOT Europe began its journey in 2000 as **European Digital Media Association (EDiMA)**, launched by online music distribution companies that wanted to expand their services across the EU. This meant that the main political issues were related to licences, which over the years have been centred on the responsibility of intermediaries, and later expanded to include European representation of Internet companies. In 2020, the association was relaunched as DOT (Digital Online Tech) Europe, to better reflect the evolution of the digital sector and demonstrate the growing variety of its members, as well as the rapid expansion of policy areas affecting its sector.

DOT Europe's mission is to participate in key EU policy debates affecting the digital sector, developing ideas and supporting policy initiatives aimed at creating an innovative, open and secure Internet for European citizens and businesses. *HQ* spoke to **Director General, Siada El Ramly**, about today's major debates and the valuable contribution of its members.

How can virtual event platforms and tech providers maintain the same relevance and influence at a time when in-person meetings are on the rise again?

I think that despite the return of face-to-face meetings, there will continue to be a demand for virtual meetings and events. For example, online meetings can be held on a more limited budget, opening up a range of options for organisations. It is possible that the pandemic period has resulted in a disproportionate increase in online meetings and tools, and that the balance may now shift a little towards face-to-face meetings. However, I believe that digital is here to stay and will continue to play an important role in the mix.

At a time when we are witnessing a rapid digital transition and new forms of news consumption, how can the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) protect the public environment from propaganda, disinformation and political interference?

The goals of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) are laudable and DOT Europe fully supports them. However, the devil is in the detail. Certain provisions of the EMFA create contradictory obligations for online platforms. Recent developments on the file introduce a *de facto* media exemption, where harmful or misleading content, such as disinformation, has to remain available on a very large online platform service solely because the content

comes from a certain type of user. Needless to say, this is in contradiction with the obligation to mitigate risks under the Digital Services Act, which is the framework legislation dealing with illegal and harmful content online. It similarly contradicts the Code of Practice on disinformation that DOT Europe and many of its members have committed to and been a vested signatory of since 2018. We have high hopes that the EMFA will be fine-tuned to deliver on its ambitions without undermining the regime that has already been put in place in the form of the Digital Services Act after thorough discussions and a tortuous legislative process.

“

One part of cybersecurity that is often overlooked is the human element

How can associations make the most of the digital services and resources that the internet now makes available for their daily work?

The pandemic had a catalysing effect on the use of technology, especially in the field of videoconferencing. These technologies were already available before the pandemic, but their use exploded and they entered the mainstream. These connectivity tools have benefited associations, for example, by making it easier for members



to get together at short notice to discuss urgent issues. They have also been very helpful in cases where not all members are physically in the same space, which makes participation and debate much more difficult. That said, public affairs work remains a people business and tech cannot fully replace a physical meeting. In many cases, being physically in the same room has advantages and allows for livelier participation and an honest exchange of views. I argue that it's a question of balance and that the best way to do this is to mix the online and the physical.

How to find a break-even point between the constant development of AI and its associated risks, such as job displacement, ethical dilemmas and privacy concerns?

There are examples of policies and regulations that take a future-proof approach, the most recent being the Digital Services Act. It is possible to design a regulatory framework that establishes rules and principles that do not have to be revised every time a technological development occurs. The AI Act has taken a step in this direction by a new requirements-based approach in what are considered the riskiest uses of an AI system. This approach could remain relevant in light of significant technological breakthroughs if applied correctly. We have seen some attempts to undermine it in the ongoing legislative discussions, and we are working to keep the original spirit of the proposal as intact as possible. This would be an example of a balanced approach, where innovation is given enough space to develop, while recognising that certain risks need to be mitigated.

“ It is possible that after the pandemic, the balance may now shift a little towards face-to-face meetings

Given that data will be key to the trajectory of businesses and consumers in a unified

digital economy, how can associations innovate their membership and revenue streams through data?

The EU has drawn up a global framework for the management of personal and non-personal data in the European bloc. The ambition of the current Commission was to avoid missing out on the expected revolution and the added value that can be brought by utilising non-personal data (e.g. industrial data). There are various estimates of the additional value this data can add to the EU's GDP in the future, but even the most conservative estimates reveal a huge amount to take away. It's really hard to predict how individual organisations can benefit and innovate using this data, but I imagine the first step requires data analysis tools. Raw data alone, without any means of analysing it, won't bring much benefit. The second step would be to understand what types of data an organisation holds and what it would like to use it for. For example, what kind of knowledge it can gain and in what area of its work.

How can we safeguard consumer communications and build the basis for a cyber-resilient data economy around the online society?

Cybersecurity has taken on an increasingly prominent role, both in EU policy-making and in everyday life. One part of cybersecurity that is often overlooked is the human element. Greater consumer awareness of the methods used to expose people to cyber-attacks (e.g. phishing, online scams, etc.) would be an important first step. There is little point in having the most sophisticated protection if there is a human being who opens the door to a potential cyber-attack. The EU has taken many steps to increase cybersecurity and we have seen a proliferation of legislation in the last five years (Cybersecurity Act, NIS2, Cyber Resilience Act), while cybersecurity elements are being added to existing pieces of legislation on product safety. This can have positive results because it forces better cybersecurity practices, but it must be balanced and avoid excessive burdens on organisations.

The original history of **EventMobi**, one of the largest event software providers on the market, has always focused on enabling event organisers to create engaging attendee experiences using the mobile event app. But more recently it has expanded to cover the entire event life cycle from managing website and registration to on-site check-in and badge printing. They were one of the first companies to create a do-it-yourself approach to managing hybrid planning, and behind the scenes they also created a product that became twofold – one for event organisers and one for participants and speakers – introducing live voting, gamification, among other innovations.

“If you add **too much automation** to events, you’ll **lose** the ability to create **human experiences**”

“We work in a very fragmented sector,” says **Bob Vaez, the company’s CEO & Founder**, and a self-confessed event geek. We spoke to him about some of the most pressing issues in the event tech world, directly from Toronto and (ironically) through a virtual room.



If we talk about the conference of the future, with all these elements such as AI, robotics and VR integrated into the process, what new interaction space are we dealing with?

Having been in the industry for 14 years, I always wondered why the adoption of technology in the events sector was so slow. My initial thought was that there was a natural tendency to be risk-averse, but after careful thought I think the real reason is actually networking. If you bring in technology that not everyone can use, you end up segmenting your audience, and that’s not the right way for events to create a safe and productive space. In the early days of mobile apps, event companies had to wait for significant smartphone adoption before they could really utilise them. What was really surprising about event tech is that everyone learned how to use virtual events in a short period of time. The moment we stop seeing mass adoption of these technologies, such as AR, robotics and AI in the consumer space, they won’t be able to take root at events – so familiarity is very important. Another significant aspect is the simplification of processes and immediate integration for planners and participants. Any event tool that requires a significant amount of integration will struggle to succeed.

Why did the organisers and associations come to these technologies so late?

Simplicity and user adoption are key. Firstly, the planners didn’t see this need because, actually, the participants didn’t have the necessary tools either. If we go back in time, most computers weren’t fast enough to process quality videoconferencing. Sometimes we forget that technology arrived at the right time. For example, if the pandemic had happened ten years ago, we wouldn’t have had this broadband speed to withstand a digital revolution. We would probably have found other ways to solve this problem with teleconferencing, but videoconferencing and virtual events have had this mass adoption because the technology and fast Internet were there. The big question now is why we’re not adopting at the same level as the pandemic. At EventMobi, we see less than 10% of our events being virtual compared to 90% in 2021, and this is supported by the majority of our clients returning to in-person events.

On the other hand, there are a considerable number of attendees and planners who would like to consume this content in multiple locations and hubs – it boils down to a question of budget. Organisers face a number of challenges, such as the unpredictability of tech developments, monetisation, team size, and managing two formats simultaneously. The adoption of technology in our sector is slow, nonetheless, for the right reasons, as we first need to create common ground and a safe space for all.



In this return to the road for many delegates, how can companies like yours mediate this hybrid transition and streamline the event planning process?

At first, everyone thought the future was hybrid, but we quickly realised that not all events can be. There are also different types of hybrid events, such as simultaneous, asynchronous, or on-demand. When we talk about networking, it's actually very difficult to get remote participants to interact with in-person ones, and there's a good reason for that. As an in-person participant, the last thing I want to do is sit in front of a laptop again. If we can communicate with all the delegates on my side, why should I resort to remote hearings? The correct way to approach the issue is to understand these two audiences in their context and framework, such as sensory experience, time zone, attention span, etc. However, there are strategies to connect them. One is to phase the event first in a virtual format for everyone and then join them in person with different sessions and programmes – allowing you to have the same type of post-event experience using an effective virtual environment, by conveying the same content through different interactions. Both audiences could use online chat or live polls to answer the same questions. There are ways to merge these two formats, but it remains a difficult task to offer the same networking experiences.

So, in short, what can technology really replace?

Everyone talks about AI and how to make everything easier and more automated, but there are things in event planning that we cannot replace. We have to remember that events, at their core, are the most authentic human experiences. If you try to add too much automation to that experience, you'll lose the ability to create it. There is a balance between automation for participants and the natural flow of human interaction. From the organisers' side, the process of curating an event is still an art form. If you consider those songs and images created by AI tools these days, at some point, this process will start to copy itself, lacking the creativity of the human mind. Maybe in ten years, AI could actually create some pretty good conference programming, but a lot of that will depend on a sufficient amount of data. Until this planning process can be completely digitalised, it will be very difficult to create artificial intelligence tools that can replace DMCs and PCOs. What's unique about event planning is the scale and complexity of its project management system. There are so many different vendors that AI can't automate everything. What's more, planners are really good at creating location- and event-specific contingency and safety plans. I have yet to see anyone trust AI to make decisions of this nature.

“ *Contemporary event management is a team sport* ”

How can an association in 2023 increase not only its audience but also its membership through a hybrid combo?

This is a critical issue for associations. We see about 25% of our association clients embracing this engagement throughout the year, and I think this idea is a little different than private social networking or group discussions. After the conference, what happened before the pandemic was, “okay, see you next year.” And then, we all went back to our offices to keep the conversation going via email or social media. With advancements in technology and the virtual factor playing a role, the association can now invite all its members into one event app to hold webinars and virtual events in a year-round engagement. The apps have become a dual-functional tool: a learning and content management system, and a networking and meeting hub. They can also use this space to run their regional hub seamlessly and preserve their online identity. This type of approach helps to increase member retention and attract new partakers, as there is now a virtual common space. Another optional and relevant benefit is conditional visibility, allowing access to selected content for potential members. A new on-board approach for 2024 as the majority of our clients and associations are returning to the essentials of in-person, but willing to pay to watch content remotely and return to that hybrid experience. We see this combo as a pendulum that, sooner or later, will centre on a crossover interaction.

How can we harness the power of attendee data across the entire event lifecycle?

There is a challenge here called data privacy. As a consumer, I reject my private conversations being used to strengthen database technology for commercial purposes. However, there is a part of the data called telemetry that we can use completely anonymously to create a better experience. The most important thing is to try to make participants understand how this data can benefit them in an in-person event. One can do their own research or let chance do its own thing, but if participants allow a tool to read their profile and analyse their interactions, we can effectively improve match-making. On the other hand, not everything related to the in-person element is tracked, unlike virtual events where it is possible to follow everything. On a face-to-face basis, there are still no centralised storage processes to collect information more efficiently. For most event data points, for example, we lack a critical mass data sets to be able to create solid AI programmes. There is a lot of confusion between AI and algorithmic processes. The promise that AI will make events completely different will not come to fruition until a critical amount of data is obtained.



It is more difficult to plan revenue for face-to-face events compared to the period before the pandemic





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WHERE THE WORLD MEETS IN ASIA PACIFIC

Glasgow will be the European Capital of Sports Science Next Year!



Aileen Crawford, Head of Tourism and Conventions at the Glasgow Convention Bureau (GCB).

What were the reasons for the city’s commitment to this strategic segment of sports?

One of the primary reasons for Glasgow’s strategy to include investing in sporting venues and hosting major international events is the economic impact. Major sports events attract tourists, visitors, and media attention, and this influx of revenue boosts the city’s economy and creates long-term job opportunities. In

addition, hosting major international sporting events puts Glasgow on the global stage, increasing its visibility, both as a successful, can-do event city, but also as an attractive place to visit in the future. Attendees who visit the city because of the event return as leisure visitors, or spread the word to others as a great city to visit.

Could this tailwind strategy create a trail of meetings and events in the future, such as this conference, leveraging partnerships between the public and private sectors?

As well as major sporting events, looking back over the last 20 years, Glasgow has hosted 64 sports-related conferences that attracted 11,000 delegates and contributing £11 million to the local economy from delegate spend. Therefore it seems rather fitting that the city looks forward to welcoming the prestigious ECSS Conference here in 2024.

Already, through the successful bid process and the planning stages, the hosting of the ECSS has offered an opportunity for “town and gown” to work closely together through the efforts of the University of the West of Scotland who led the bid and involved a variety of public and private sector supporters of the conference coming to Glasgow and to Scotland.

What kind of legacies and impacts do you hope to bring to Glasgow with this conference both directly and over time?

A conference of this size and scale has a significant economic impact on the local community, which is projected to be around £5 million. But beyond that, the potential for positive social impact is even greater. As the theme of the conference is partly centred on Sport in the Community, the GCB will be working with the ECSS to help develop health and wellbeing strategies by taking the subject of the conference out into the community. At the GCB, we take the legacy of the conference incredibly seriously, which is evidenced by the fact that we have a team dedicated to positive impact and legacy. Over the last 13 years, we have supported 26 Impact or Legacy events attended by thousands of Glaswegians.

There are a number of charitable organisations operating in and around Glasgow that promote the role of sport in the community. One such organisation is the **Live Well Community Referral Scheme**, which offers a free programme of activities for people who want to lead better, healthier lives. There is clearly a synergy here with the ECSS theme and we will be exploring these opportunities. We know that this, in turn, will raise the profile of the conference and take it beyond the walls of the conference centre, allowing for a real and tangible impact at a local level.

Glasgow was announced as the 2024 host of the **Annual Congress of the European College of Sport Science (ECSS)**. The event, which will take place at the **Scottish Event Campus (SEC)** from 2 to 5 July 2024, is expected to attract 3,000 delegates, marking the first time in 28 years that the meeting will be held in Scotland. The announcement comes as Glasgow boasts the title of European Capital of Sport for the second time, celebrating two decades of successful development and investment among the world's leading sporting cities. Set up in conjunction with the team from the University of the West of Scotland, the theme of this congress will be **Enhancing Health, Performance and Community Sport**, within a scientific programme that will consist of more than 2,000 presentations on current topics in sports science, divided into plenary lectures, invited symposia, oral presentations and posters.

Over the last 20 years, Glasgow has invested more than £200 million in its sports venues, such as the Emirates Arena, the Glasgow BMX Centre and the renovated Kelvin Hall, which has enabled it to host a number of world-class events, such as the 2014 Commonwealth Games, the 2015 World Gymnastics Championships or the UEFA EURO 2020 games. The city now plans to continue building on the legacy of more than 20 years of sustained success in organising major sporting events by welcoming the world's leading sports scientists to the city for 4 days of learning, collaboration and discussion. As usual in this regular feature in the magazine, we spoke to the heads of the organising association and the host destination about all the elements surrounding this major event for next year's calendar.



*Prof. Dr. Alexander Ferranti,
President-Elect of the European
College of Sport Science*

What do you look for in a destination as a partner at this level?

As an European association, ECSS tries to fulfil the vision of promoting Sports Science as widely as possible and involving many nations from all geographical destinations. Naturally, we need a strong local university partner for successful scientific and organisational implementation, a well-equipped infrastructure to host 3,000 participants and

a clear commitment from the city administration and local bureau to promote physical activity, sport and sports science. The cultural and historical diversity in Europe provides further arguments for selecting a location, because scientific debate is always integrated into a touristically-attractive social programme. The city of Glasgow, the University of the West of Scotland and the Scottish Event Campus fulfil all these requirements exceptionally well and obtained excellent ratings in all categories during the competition process.

What can delegates expect from the synergies with local partners and as a surprise factor in the programme?

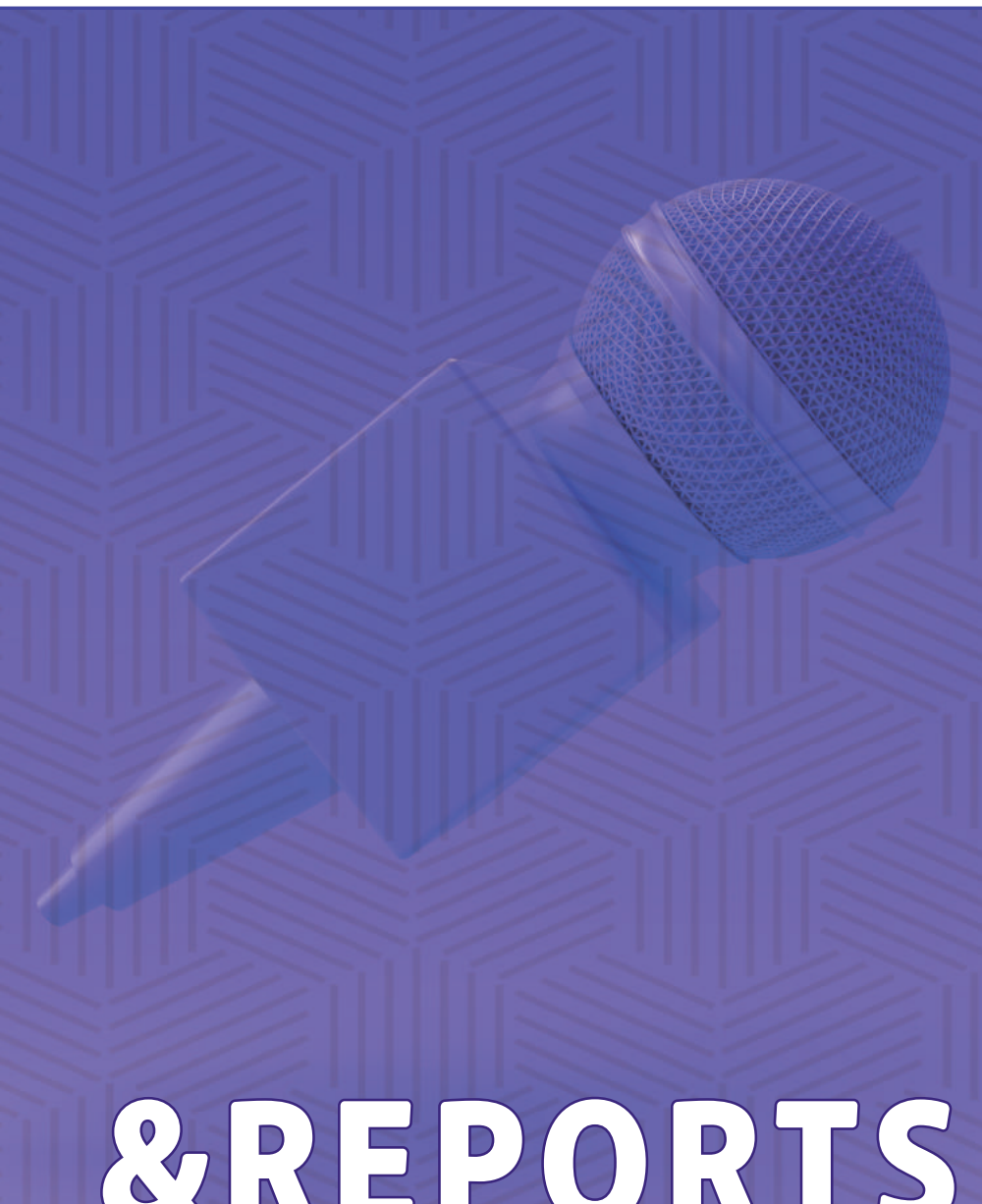
Understanding the relationships between physical activity and exercise training for health and performance enhancements across an interdisciplinary approach is the most important overarching goal of sport science research. In this regard, the congress primarily serves

the expansion of scientific knowledge, the formation of networks for research projects and the promotion of young researchers. Beyond these major goals, a “surprise factor” may consist of our attempt to involve the Glasgow community by opening the congress doors for specific target groups such as politicians, medical doctors, physical education teachers, coaches, as well as athletes and to offer them attractive presentations and workshops. Overall, there is also the goal of bringing our ideal of a physically active society into the European metropolises in order to influence political decisions in favour of an active city. This initiative is already being positively promoted in Glasgow across numerous projects such as **the Glasgow Cycling & Urban Sports Strategy**, and therefore Glasgow deserves the current title of **European Capital of Sport 2023**.

What does the ECSS want to leave for the city and its local communities as a key legacy of your meeting?

The city of Glasgow will be able to present itself in the best possible light to the international community, as we will be taking to the streets on several occasions during the congress. For example, we'll be organising the traditional **Bengt Saltin Charity Run** on the banks of the River Clyde and we're also planning a reception at the city's **Science Centre**, as well as at the historic **Paisley Town Hall**. Delegates will have the opportunity to enjoy Glasgow by night during our closing party, which will probably take place at the **Platform**. In terms of content, it can never be ruled out that local decision-makers will continue to be inspired and debate innovative ways to improve health, performance and community sports based on knowledge they have acquired during the congress. Last but not least, we enable the University of the West of Scotland to present itself as an academic institution with a world-class educational and scientific reputation, featuring a growing portfolio of sports science-related study programmes.

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📍 GREAT BARRIER REEF, CAIRNS, AUSTRALIA

CONNECT GREAT LEAVE GREATER

Connect with nature and each other
in Cairns & Great Barrier Reef.



CAIRNS &
GREAT BARRIER REEF
BUSINESS EVENTS



An Intrepid Winning Mentality in the Sunshine State!

Brisbane is an Asia-Pacific hub for science, medicine and sports, with its world-class venues, countless cultural experiences and environmental heritage on the city's doorstep, it has also become an international showcase for delegates to network and develop their ideas in a conference setting. A true Cinderella story that has made it the fastest-growing capital city in Australia... I've seen it for myself.

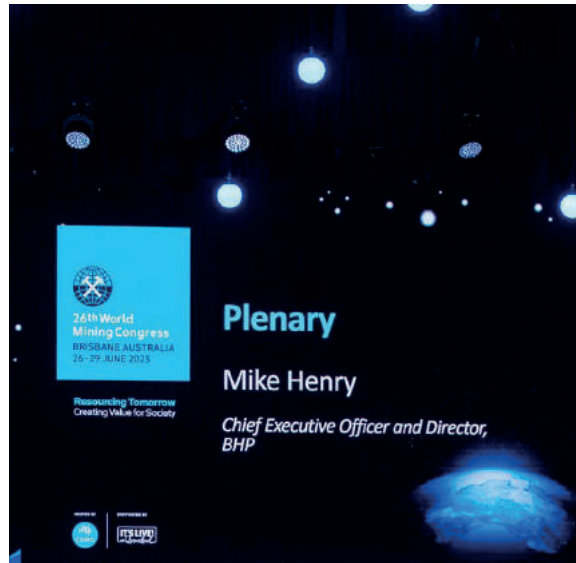
Manuel A. Fernandes reports

"I begin today by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we gather today, and pay my respects to their Elders past and present. I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today." From landing on Australian territory to the various events we attended, this protocol ritual describes the extent to which the commitment of the Reconciliation Plan is inscribed in the indigenous cultures and historical memory of the country (see the guide to *Aboriginal Australia* in HQ #110). In Australia, there is a very strong planning for the future, always accompanied by the legacy of the past, which is reflected in the plateau of events that Queensland has set for the coming years. Several ambitious projects, an infrastructure overhaul and a symbiotic, vocational approach join a plethora of international business events that make Brisbane one of the trendiest cities in the world. With the right mix of urban redevelopment, an easy-going lifestyle and strong business prospects, Brisbane has reaped the rewards with the fastest growth among Australia's major cities, recording an annual population growth rate of 1.8% over the past five years, outpacing hipper Sydney and Melbourne.

Fuelled by a \$19 billion pipeline of transformation projects, the city has a compact and robust map of hotels and event venues to add to a number of strategic developments ranging from a multi-disciplinary cultural centre, a brand-new leisure and dining precinct at the city's old wharf – **Howard Smith Wharves** – and a mega-project for an integrated resort hotel covering more than 12



HQ EXCLUSIVE REPORT



hectares of CBD land – the **Queen’s Wharf** set to open in April 2024. Nowadays, the proximity of the facilities, the flexibility of the conditions, the ease of access and the familiarity with the place have a great influence on the decisions of event managers. Situated in the South Bank Convention Precinct, the **Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Center (BCEC)** is Queensland’s premier events hub and home for associations to meet with a global reputation that has won it numerous international awards, such as the AIPC APEX “World’s Best” Convention Center Award for 2016 to 2018. With eight function floors and a multitude of halls adjacent to various hotels and riverside restaurants, this centre allows several events to be held at the same time, complementing it with local cultural experiences, thanks to partnerships with the **Queensland Art Gallery** and the **Gallery of Modern Art**.

Furthermore, Brisbane’s economy is forecast to grow to \$239bn by 2041, underpinned by hubs of excellence in environmental sustainability, healthcare and social assistance, agribusiness, energy, ICT, construction, infrastructure and many others, which position the city’s renowned players and institutions as a driving force for solving global human and business challenges across a wide arc of key industries and areas of research and innovation. On the education front, Brisbane boasts three major universities – **The University of Queensland**, the **Queensland University of Technology** and **Griffith University** – in addition to Australia’s largest medical research centre, the **QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute**. All these ingredients mean that the drivers of this project are cooking up a new batch of events that reflect all these pieces of hospitality, key industries and training institutes... which is why I travelled to this part of the world in July. Booked for late July at the BCEC was **IAS 2023**, the **12th IAS Conference on HIV Science**, the world’s most influential biennial meeting on HIV research and its applications showcasing critical advances in basic, clinical and operational HIV research, extending the scientific parameters into policy and beyond. Thousands of researchers gathered in Brisbane to highlight the remarkable role of science in infectious diseases and viral medicine in Queensland, emphasising the Australian model in the pursuit of the virtual elimination of HIV at its borders. IAS 2023 also focused on the challenges and successes of the HIV response for the most vulnerable people in the Asia-Pacific region. With scientists from the country’s leading research institutes playing an active role in bringing about this important event, BCEC advocate and conference chair **Prof Charles Gilks** led the bid consortium along with **ASHM (Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine)** and the team at the BCEC with strong support from the **Queensland Government**, through **Queensland Health** and **Tourism and Events Queensland**, **Tourism Australia** and **Brisbane Economic Development Agency**. “This conference is a milestone in what Australia as a country has been able to achieve, because it encompasses civil society, scientific communities, government and academia. Politicians were very important in our response, because this was a bipartisan issue that has never been the subject of political struggle,” Prof Gilks tells us.



The return of these high-profile international conferences post-COVID is driving a contagious boom, delivering \$90 million in economic activity to the city. “This conference is one of 28 international conventions set to take place at the centre during the 2023/24 financial year. We have actively collaborated with the scientific and medical community through the **Convention Advocate Partnership**, which includes many eminent scientists and academics,” says **Kym Guesdon, General Manager of BCEC**. This elite group of influencers, which counts among its members some of Australia’s best practitioners, researchers, business leaders and innovators, works with the convention centre not only to attract better outcomes and checks on its global agenda but also to enhance the excellence and expertise of the disciplines to which those events relate. To date, the BCEC’s 80 advocates have helped secure 141 conferences for Brisbane, resulting in \$171.9 million in direct expenditure for the city and state, but more importantly, it has multiplied the prestige and vocational tune-up for the bids in place. And the social legacies go far beyond the expected economic transitions that make up the spreadsheets: for younger generations, this means opportunities to utilise the strong links to universities and higher education, free career and networking centres, affordable housing and reduced on-the-ground costs. In terms of public engagement, collaboration with cultural partners – the **Queensland Library** and the **Queensland Museum** – will serve as a launch pad for the organisation of public talks and workshops, bringing the theme and purpose of the conferences closer to the public.

But this strategic process is not only made up of scientific meetings. On 22 July, I had the pleasure of attending the first **FIFA Women’s World Cup** match in Queensland at **Suncorp Stadium**. On the football pitch, the England and Haiti teams were battling it out with the ambition of going further in the tournament, but in the stands (which were practically packed) the atmosphere was one of joy and success, exuding a feeling of something greater to come. Brisbane was elected to host the **XXXV Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2032**, and if we’re talking about long-standing legacies, Brisbane 2032 will massively benefit from the new flexible approach directing a strong vision towards sports and local communities – with reforms that allow the IOC to work in partnership with cities, regions and countries to encourage Olympic projects that use a high percentage of existing and temporary facilities and that align with the long-term development plan. This vision and planning fits in with regional and national strategies for economic and social development in Queensland, and fulfils the objectives for the Olympic Movement outlined in the Olympic Agenda 2020 and 2020+5, while focusing on promoting memorable sporting experiences for athletes and fans.

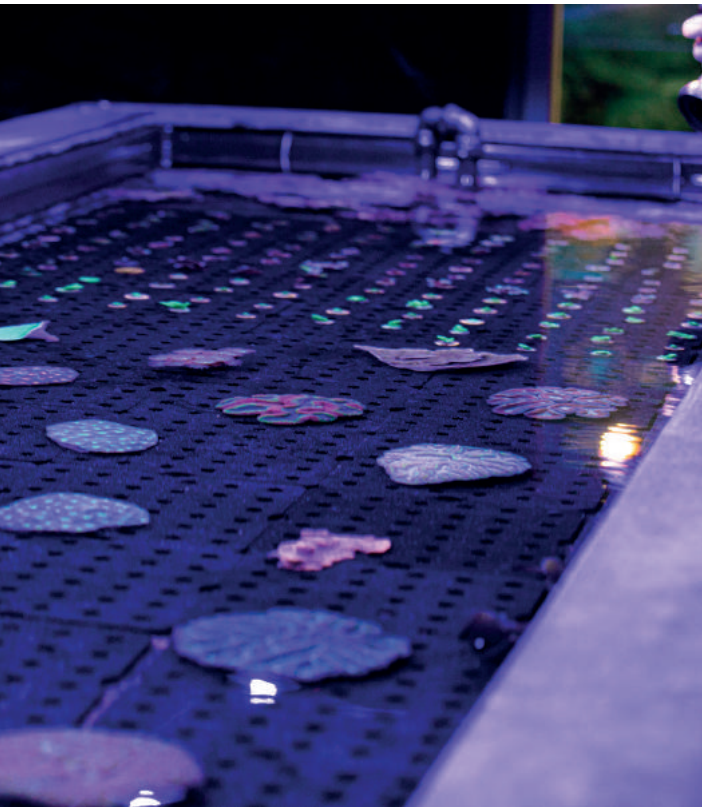


Conservation Spotlight on Events in Cairns

Gateway to the Great Barrier Reef, Tropical North Queensland maintains a genuine connection to Nature and its World Heritage Sites. There is no time for “Greenwashing” here, as the problems caused by global warming and pollution are real. Welcome to Cairns...

Before we knew it, we were embarking from vibrant Brisbane to the divine paradise of Tropical North Queensland. Time flies, and as soon as we arrived at Cairns Airport, I realised that not only the temperature (hot) and the biosphere (exotic) were different in this giant Australian state, but also the laid-back and familiar attitude of the people who met each other in the arrivals hall. I later saw this feeling confirmed: Cairns, our second stunning and quintessential seaside destination, enjoys a reputation of being a “ten-minute town”, where everything (venues, hotels, shops, restaurants) is practically side by side and buildings cannot exceed a stipulated height of 46 metres. That claim certainly applies to the distance from the airport to the **Shangri-La Marina Hotel**, which houses the waterside restaurant **The Backyard**. Situated between Trinity Inlet, the Coral Sea and the Cairns Esplanade, the hotel has 255 rooms and suites, most with views of the Marlin Marina, and 16 event spaces with natural daylight and all equipped with the latest audio-visual technology.

This visit also showcased the AUD\$176 million expansion and refurbishment of the **Cairns Convention Center**, which has shaken up its entire appearance by adding incredible new spaces such as the **Trinity Level**, offering visitors breathtaking views of its world-renowned natural heritage sites. The expansion project encompassed a significant number of improvements, allowing it to accommodate multiple or larger events, with conferences and exhibitions for up to 2,500 guests, and taking into account the architecture, sustainability and flow of the space. Additions include a rooftop banquet area, three state-of-the-art meeting rooms and a space for exhibitions and plenary lectures, providing a total of 10,500 square meters of new physical space.



An incredible area where the world's oldest rainforest meets the **Great Barrier Reef, Cairns, Palm Cove, Port Douglas** and all the seafront locations maintain a genuine connection with nature and look to sustainability and conservation as vital to their long-term livelihoods. With many of their key industries centred on agriculture, tropical life sciences, maritime services or aviation, concerns for responsible tourism and net zero-impact events is an adamant priority, especially with the threat of climate change. "The foundations of our visitor economy are based above all on our natural assets and environmental resources, so looking after a sustainable hospitality, tourism and events framework is absolutely crucial for us," **Rosie Douglas, General Manager of Business Events Cairns and Great Barrier Reef**, tells us. Among these flagrant examples of sustainable economy are two family-owned DMCs that we came across during



our inspection visit: **Skyrail Rainforest Cableway**, the first tour operator in the world to obtain EarthCheck certification and one of less than 10 active EarthCheck Masters, invites you to tour the jungle canopy from above while promoting the reduction of greenhouse gases and waste. Today, Skyrail's commitment to conservation and the environment continues through the **Skyrail Rainforest Foundation**, which raises funds for rainforest research and education. The award-winning **Rainforestation Nature Park**, a 40-hectare tourist stronghold, is located in the heart of a World Heritage-listed rainforest, just five minutes from the iconic village of Kuranda. Here, you can not only plan your event in a magical setting, but also learn more about indigenous culture, fauna and flora through the **Pamagirri Aboriginal Experience**.

The mission of conserving and restoring the biodiversity of the Queensland Tropics was further enhanced with a stop at the **Cairns Aquarium**, and not just for educational purposes. In this ever-present dialectic between the wonderful ecosystems of the rainforest, mangroves and the Great Barrier Reef, the Aquarium recreates wild ecosystems in various exhibition tanks but also raises awareness of their increasing degradation. On this subject, behind the scenes there is a turtle hospital designed to rehabilitate many of these animals from risks such as fishing nets or plastic waste.

In addition to Australia's first and only living coral biobank curated by the **Great Barrier Reef Legacy** as part of the **Forever Reef Project** – which harbours nearly half of the 400 species of hard coral on the Great Barrier Reef – the objective is to reproduce a laboratory reserve of the Great Barrier Reef to safeguard the survival of all these species. A final mention goes to the **Crystalbrook hotel collection** in Cairns that owns boutique hotels along the entire east coast of Australia, dedicated to what it advocates as *#ResponsibleLuxury*. Wooden key cards, paperless check-in, recyclable room items, and no single-use plastics and iPads in rooms are among **Crystalbrook Riley's** initiatives that have earned it the EarthCheck certification.





Taiwan is Open to the World With **Endless Possibilities!**

Taiwan's abundant natural resources and cultural diversity, as well as a great variety of leisure activities, provide a unique backdrop for business events, enabling international business professionals to experience a dynamic fusion of nature, infrastructure, knowledge and culture. This has led to the island nation's reputation as an ideal destination for organising international exhibitions and conferences.

Right in the heart of Asia, Taiwan has a strategic geographical location among the main Asian markets. With convenient domestic transport – to get from the international airport to Taipei City's centre it takes only a 30-minute ride on the metro, an efficient visa issuing system and easy accessibility, the nation-island is known for its security, freedom and democratic values within a solid legal framework and a stable political environment. Taiwan is globally recognised as a leading supplier of semiconductors and key components, as well as playing a vital role in international supply chains, especially for ICT, electric car and medical sectors. Flourishing industries and collaborations between government, industry and academia further propel the holding of large international business activities in Taiwan.

As far as international conferences are concerned, Taiwan excels in the technological, scientific and medical fields, possessing strong professional competences and backgrounds. Its technological advances and innovations have positioned it at the forefront of these industries, making its experience and pool of talent invaluable for improving conferences and conventions. With modern, well-developed facilities, ISO-certified venues, a broad range of hotels and a convenient transport system, this comprehensive industrial ecosystem provides smooth commercial activities and impeccable experiences.

Since last year, the Bureau of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Economic Affairs, Taiwan has been implementing its Expo-tech Digital Exhibition Leadership program, which focuses on physical exhibitions and utilizes technologies such as IoT, AI, AR/VR, and 5G to develop digital exhibition solutions. This initiative involves the smartification of exhibition halls, data collection for event management, and seamless interaction between online viewers, exhibitors and physical participants, introducing a new form of digital exhibition technology for business events. Collaborating with curators and venue operators, the program creates a smart exhibition showcase to serve as the foundation for domestic and international promotion, enhancing the quality and competitiveness of international exhibitions hosted in Taiwan. This project has gained special recognition this year from The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry (UFI), receiving their 2023 Industry Partners Award, laying groundwork for the future of digital trade show presentations.

In the first half of the year, Taiwan already hosted 99 international conferences and 75 exhibitions, with an impressive 75% of them being physical formats, while the rest were conducted in a hybrid manner, combining both online and offline elements.



(Left) Kaohsiung Exhibition Center is Taiwan's first exhibition venue to feature a dedicated 5G network. (Right) ICC TAINAN opened in 2022

Photo courtesy of KING SHIN ARCHITECTS





Events in the pipeline:

- 2023 APCNP (Asia and Pacific Congress of Nurse Practitioners)
- 2023 FAPA (Federation of Asian Pharmaceutical Associations)
- 2023 Asia Agri-Tech Expo & Forum (AAT)
- 2024 World Indigenous Tourism Summit (WITS)
- 2024 23rd World Orchid Conference (WOC)
- 2025 IAPCO Annual Meeting & General Assembly
- 2025 MEDINFO
- 2025 Urological Association of Asia (22nd UAA)

Hailing the return to in-person business events, MEET TAIWAN served as the CVB in Taiwan has rebranded this year under the theme “MEET TAIWAN Open Arms”, reshaping Taiwan’s business events industry brand image with a simple and warm slogan. Using a universally understood gesture, the open arms represent a wholehearted welcome to international business travellers coming to Taiwan.

In September of this year, MEET TAIWAN introduced the inaugural “MEET TAIWAN Festival”. Its grand launch event took place on September 7 and featured the debut of the “MEET TAIWAN Open Arms” mascot, PaQ. The name “PaQ”phonetically sounds like “open” in the Taiwanese Hokkien language, symbolising the warm hospitality of the Taiwanese people. Taiwan not only opens its arms, but also invites international business professionals to come to Taiwan, opening their minds to imagination and together creating endless possibilities. PaQ also carries a sustainability mission, making periodic appearances at domestic and international business events. For each hug received, it accumulates one unit of sustainable business event fund, turning sustainability concepts into practical actions in business events.

For the first time, an original theme song “MEET TAIWAN Open Arms” was released at the event, accompanied by a music video promoting some of Taiwan’s business event industry attributes to the world. *Scan QR Code to watch MEET TAIWAN Open Arms theme song MV.*

The MEET TAIWAN Festival adopted the concept of “business events industry DNA” – four core elements of business events industry that were highlighted through various activities: inviting “International” business events to Taiwan, facilitating “Interaction” between domestic and international industries, hosting the Asian MICE Forum (AMF) for “Knowledge” sharing in the professional business events field, and collaborating with industries to explore “Future” business events opportunities. These elements have contributed to Taiwan’s flourishing business events industry.

The 2023 MEET TAIWAN Festival goes beyond MEET TAIWAN’s events. It also serves as a significant celebration that includes the entire business event industry throughout Taiwan. In September, a hundred prominent figures from Taiwan’s business event industry have come together to create a diverse portfolio of events. The sheer number of participants is a testament that Taiwan’s business event industry not only has fully recovered but flourish with renewed energy, position itself for an even brighter future!

More information: www.meettaiwan.com
Organised by Bureau of Foreign Trade, MOEA
Taiwan External Trade Development Council

Ad. by Bureau of Foreign Trade, MOEA



(Up)The MEET TAIWAN Festival had its grand launch event on September 7
(Left) A local acappella group from Taiwan, composed and performed the theme song live with the mascot PaQ together at the MEET TAIWAN Festival global launch event.



Granada:

Meetings in the heart of Flamenco and at the pace of Legacies!

Granada is a unique city recognised for its remarkable culture, history and quality of life. It also boasts an excellent portfolio of venues, hotels and MICE services that bridge the gap to its research and education institutions. We spoke with the director of the local convention bureau about the upswing of activity, upcoming events and legacies for the region.

At the foot of the Sierra Nevada, between the Darro and Genil rivers, lies one of the most interesting cities in southern Iberia. Granada is one of Spain's most visited destinations thanks to the Alhambra, its museums and monuments, the gastronomy and its close relationship with flamenco culture. To the impressive Andalusian legacy, from which the Moorish culture is indistinguishable, are added the architectural jewels of the Renaissance and the most modern facilities of the 21st century. The fact that it was the last city reconquered by the Catholic Monarchs in 1492 gives Granada an unmistakable Arab flavour. Nevertheless, Granada has been a MICE destination for over 20 years, positioning the city and the province as one of the main destinations for meetings and conventions in Spain, largely due to its prestigious university, its Health Technology Park, the **Spanish National Research Council** and its renowned hospitals. "In terms of business tourism figures, Granada has shown in the pre-pandemic years good results compared to its competitors and, especially in 2023 and beyond, a large number of MICE events are being confirmed, once again supporting the attractiveness of our destination for hosting meetings and events of all kinds," reveals **Eva Garde, Director of Granada Convention Bureau (GCB)**.

Granada and its businesses have been patient and resilient during these last two difficult years. For GCB, this has been a period of self-reflection in which many destination management companies and city stakeholders have taken the opportunity to reinvent themselves. With the comeback of demand in the sector, DMCs have responded with conviction and competence alongside event organisers to make it possible for any type of event to return to this unique destination. "The attraction of our destination for association congresses can be summed up in the ideal size of our city, well connected with a congress centre in the city centre and with more than 16,000 high-quality hotel rooms within walking distance, as well as a historical and cultural offer that makes it possible to organise a unique and distinctive social programme that only Granada can offer," Garde tells us. "The diversity of our province is not to be forgotten, within a 30-minute drive, you can find a thousand and one ways to get away from the city, from the desert to the mountains, from snow to the tropical coast of Granada." It's safe to say that one of Granada's priorities is to continue to grow and evolve as a consolidated MICE destination, based on sustainable and cross-sectoral development. However, sustainability has become more than a priority. It has become a commitment involving all public and private players.





On the other hand, Granada is also a living testimony to several civilisations and a crossing point for various cultures, both in its rich history and in tourism in Spain, welcoming people from many other nations into an exciting and effervescent melting pot. “This has become one of our most idiosyncratic characteristics and one of our great differentiating elements, and it can only be truly understood when you come to discover los Duendes de la Alhambra that captivate everyone who visits. However, in recent years, the tourism business network specialised in MICE has shown great commitment to staying at the forefront of new technological trends, modernising their facilities and offering innovative products and experiences, demonstrating a real commitment to sustainability and the environment,” explains Eva, who goes on: “GCB actively participates in international associations such as ICCA and other Spanish national associations, in order to keep abreast of the latest developments in the sector and to be able to offer our destinations and companies the latest tools and information on trends that are currently taking place.”

As in so many other destinations, the Andalusian city faces major environmental problems, such as CO₂ emissions and air pollution, for which the circular economy can provide solutions. Sustainability for those in charge here is more than awareness, it is a commitment to action and the only viable way to do tourism. “The city’s professional MICE and Tourism sectors have responded through official ISO 20121 certifications, measuring and offsetting the carbon event footprint, tackling responsible waste management, and adopting local products,” says Garde. “The positive impact that MICE tourism has on destinations, from a transversal perspective of their economy, society and environment, is increasingly evident for Granada’s public institutions and private companies, and the commitment to this segment has left a more than proven positive impact and tangible legacy.” Moreover, the **Granada Congress Club** aims to recognise the achievements

of leaders in medicine, science, technology, business, academia, and research centres, who in their position and within their areas of expertise, have been trying to attract conferences to the city and promote it internationally. “The legacy that events leave in destinations in the long term is much more than a positive impact,” says Garde, “it becomes a lasting impact with objectives aligned both with the association or event organiser, and with the destination and its priorities.” This is in line with the local strategy to raise awareness among stakeholders to ensure that events have a positive long-term impact, generating measurable changes at social, political and infrastructural levels.

Held from 9-13 September, 2023, **IBRO World Congress of Neuroscience**, brought together more than 4,000 experts from 90+ countries, following the bidding process initiated in 2014 by the **Spanish Society of Neurosciences, Kenes** and the GCB. According to the director, hosting this congress is great news because it will have an important and lasting positive impact in many areas: “An example of this is the painting exhibition ‘Butterflies of the soul’ by Ramón y Cajal, to bring knowledge about the brain science closer to local citizens. The exhibition opened last June and will last until the end of September 2023, as a way to raise awareness for the congress.” Focusing on the legacy of events held in Granada, another example worth mentioning would be the recent congress of the **Spanish Society of General Medicine (SEMG)** held in the city last June. With the aim of drawing attention to the lack of sleep quality in adolescents due to the use of smartphones and new technologies, the SEMG launched a local communication campaign called “Don’t let technology steal your dreams”. On the occasion, several lectures were held in local schools and a competition on the subject is planned at the end of the year.



QSNCC Sets the Stage for the Annual Industry Gathering in **Bangkok!**



As a leading metropolis in Asia, Bangkok has extensive experience in hosting countless international meetings but now with the return of its **Queen Sirikit National Convention Center (QSNCC)**, the city can provide flexible solutions for events of all types. One of those that will mark the 2023 agenda is undoubtedly the **62nd ICCA congress** where several delegates and members (such as *HQ*) will be present in November.

Five times larger than its predecessor, the new QSNCC is a versatile and modern venue that embraces Thai identity with sustainability and well-being in mind. With a total space of 300,000 square metres, the new centre offers 8 exhibition halls, 4 conference halls, 4 plenary halls, 50 meeting rooms and a greater variety of commercial spaces. Its accessibility to the Metropolitan Rapid Transit (MRT) and the 3,000 indoor parking spaces make the QSNCC the most convenient centre in CBD.

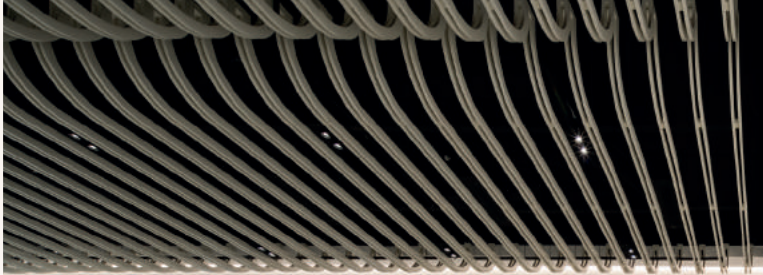
QSNCC was the stage that the **International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA)** chose in Bangkok for its 62nd congress, which will be held from 12 to 15 November 2023. One of the largest annual events in the global MICE calendar, ICCA congress is attended by members representing more than 1,000 public and private organisations from over 100 countries. The ICCA's decision also demonstrates the confidence of the association meetings industry in Thailand, this being the third time that the renowned congress will be held in the Land of Smiles after the 1994 edition in Bangkok and 2010 in Pattaya. "ICCA is very much looking forward to bringing our 62nd

congress to Bangkok. We are thrilled to be partnering with the QSNCC, a truly remarkable state-of-the-art venue, and one that will give our delegates a complete and unforgettable congress experience. We are working closely with stakeholders and partners in Thailand to ensure we all deliver something that goes beyond usual expectations to leave a lasting cultural and professional impact on those attending," says **Senthil Gopinath, ICCA CEO**.

The ICCA congress is centred on sustainability and the creative potential for reimagining cities and communities. QSNCC's refurbishment emphasizes sustainability, showcasing green building practices that reduce pollutants and divert construction waste. Key features include energy-efficient architecture, green spaces, and eco-friendly waste management. This environmentally friendly space management will be showcased at this year's ICCA congress, a carbon-neutral conference that will prove to delegates Thailand's firm commitment to sustainability.

Technologically, QSNCC upgraded its infrastructure to support high-speed Internet and implemented





contactless access and advanced security measures. The newly added “BALM” – Bangkok’s Active Lifestyle Mall – offers a diverse retail experience over 11,000m² including F&B, café, spa, sports outlet, bookstore, pharmacy, convenience stores, co-working space, and shower station. Conveniently located within QSNCC, and easily accessible via MRT transit and Benjakitti Forest Park, it enhances the convention experience, providing relaxation and exploration opportunities for delegates before and after the ICCA congress.

“We look forward to showcasing how ICCA uses the power of education, innovation, and collaboration to shape our wider industry, and in doing so, benefit society. So, the programme is planned, the people are coming, the days are counting down until we can all enjoy the colour, the spectacle, and the hospitality that only Bangkok can deliver,” summarised Gopinath.

“QSNCC intends to heighten the value of the meetings where inspiration is ignited and experience is inscribed in meeting attendees. ICCA Annual congress in Bangkok is a perfect fit for us as it is a high-profile gathering of meeting professionals of all generations across the globe. The venue’s ambience, sustainability initiatives, convenient location and accessibility, green space, world-class facilities, professional staff and Thai hospitality are key ingredients for the enhanced value we are to deliver with our heart and soul. We are certain that QSNCC will create inspiration and memorable experiences for all ICCA delegates,” concludes **Surapol Utintu, CEO, N.C.C. Management & Development Co., Ltd, the operator of QSNCC.**



Tokyo

City-Tech for a Sustainable Future!



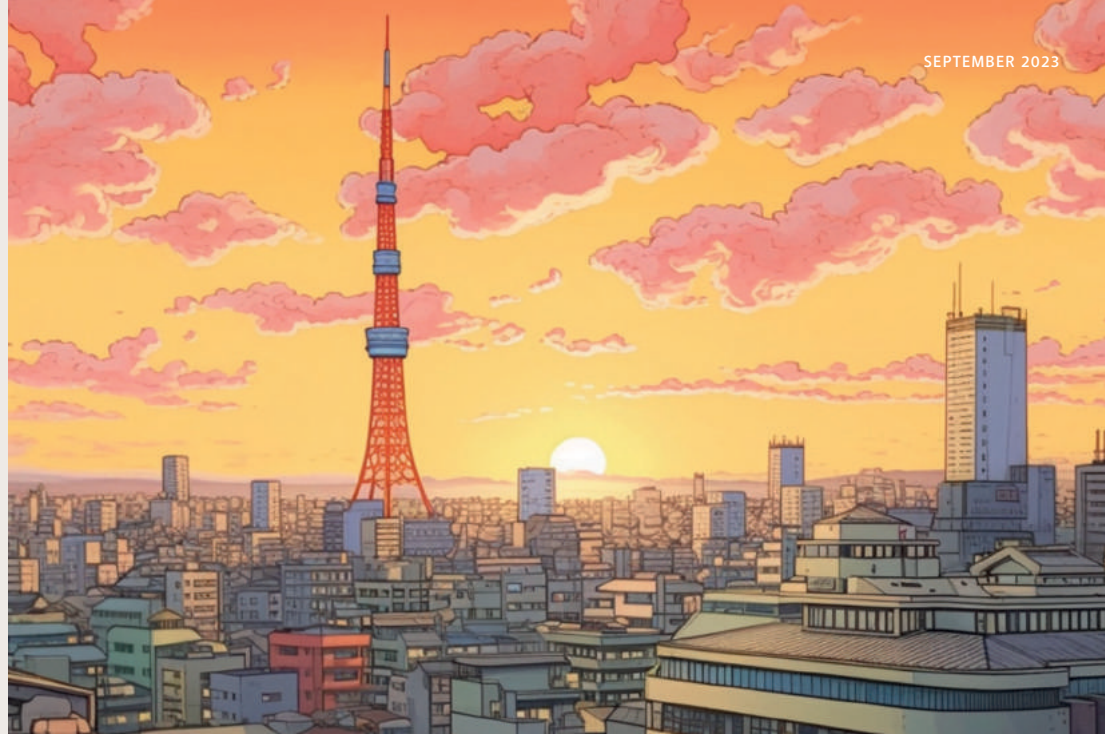
Few destinations around the world are as fascinating and cutting-edge as Tokyo. To promote the use of high technology in MICE events, the **Tokyo Convention & Visitors Bureau (TCVB)** carefully selected 15 technologies with the help of a selection committee and went down the rabbit hole with robots and avatars. Check the latest innovations in the Japanese capital.

With the aim of taking MICE events to the next level, utilising a robust suite of technologies as well as applying this experience to the betterment of society, Tokyo is making dramatic leaps forward in the areas of accessibility, sustainability and inclusion, increasing the efficiency and productivity of remote participation. This is supported by new facilities for business events, including the recently opened **Tokyo Metropolitan Tama Business Activation Centre (Tokyo Tama Mirai Messe)** in Hachioji, with the largest hall at 2,400m², **Zepp Shinjuku** for around 1,500 people in Tokyu Kabukicho Tower, **TOKYO NODE HALL** with capacity for 338 people in Toranomon Hills Station Tower and the current construction of facilities for business events around Takanawa Gateway station. To showcase the many state-of-the-art technologies that can be applied to business events in the city, the TCVB recently presented the **TOKYO MICE Technology Guidelines**, which contain 15 technologies and explanations on how to use them. “Tokyo is a metropolis like no other, representing a vital crossroads where 400 years of history and tradition meet innovation. From historic sites such as Asakusa Temple, Meiji Shrine and the Imperial Palace to the latest icon of Azabudai Hills, our city offers excitement beyond

expectations,” says **Kazuko Toda, Senior Director of Business Events at TCVB** (pictured on the next page).

Worldwide business events are returning to pre-pandemic levels

Statistics also illustrate the Japanese city’s recent successes. According to the Japan Tourism Agency, last May’s statistics on accommodation revealed an increase of 20.1% compared to 2019, surpassing pre-coronavirus figures. The number of visitors to the country exceeded 10.71 million in the first half of this year (+72% of the same period in 2019). Although statistics on the number of business travellers have not yet been released, the bureau’s daily activities show a strong recovery. In addition, incentives have seen a huge comeback: “a large insurance-related group from Malaysia, with more than 1,200 people, visited Tokyo recently; as for association meetings, the **International Congress of Nutrition** and the **International Meeting of Societies of Investigative Dermatology** held in December 2022 and May 2023, attracted more than 3,500 people and 2,500 people respectively.” The **International Congress of Industrial and Applied Mathematics** was held in August this year



and attracted around 5,000 delegates.

So, how did the sector react during the pandemic? “For a start, venues and hotels opted for online and hybrid conferences; PCOs responded in the same way to this most serious setback by going online; DMCs expanded their activity beyond travel to operate state vaccinations, with others entering the PCO sector successfully continuing their activities. Like other major cities around the world, Japan’s corporate events sector is facing a labour shortage. However, the key players remain in the industry and are as active as ever, providing comprehensive support for postponed association meetings to ensure they can be realised as quickly as possible,” adds Kazuko.

Diversity rises with increased immigration

Meanwhile, the diversity of the population has accelerated in recent years, with the number of foreign residents in Japan at the end of 2022 rising by 11.4% year-on-year to a record 3,075,213, the Immigration Services Agency said. Tokyo is home to the largest number of these residents and recorded the biggest gain – increasing by 63,231 to a total of 581,112. The number of foreign students and technical interns has also risen sharply following the relaxation of COVID-19 border measures, and much of this is due to the vast university network and world-class facilities. “Over 140 universities are located in the Tokyo area, with approximately 70,000 teaching professionals and 700,000 students. In addition, there are roughly 70 public and 90 private research institutions. All in all, Tokyo

is the true academic hub of Japan, and more than 1,000 academic societies and associations are located here. For these reasons, TCVB can quickly establish a close liaison with academia and industry when bidding for international conferences, immediately setting up local bidding committees.”

A recent example of this was the **45th International Conference on Ocean, Offshore and Arctic Engineering – OMAE 2026**, where TCVB obtained letters of support from professors at the University of Tokyo and Nihon University, as well as from eight related national organisations, successfully securing the bid. Regarding the requirements of associations in this new conference season, the TCVB has noticed a growing need for sustainability in business events. In response, the TCVB developed the Carbon Footprint Calculator for Business Events and created the Sustainable Events Support desk to offer support to local organisers.

Sustainable Experiences for Business Events

As one of the world’s most populous and industrial cities, Tokyo takes sustainability very seriously. The Tokyo Metropolitan Government has created “**Carbon Half**”, a plan to halve greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and achieve net zero global emissions by 2050. In light of these efforts, Tokyo’s business events industry has also been proactive in its contributions to the SDGs and is initiating various sustainable practices. “Our team, in particular, has been raising awareness of sustainability in the events sector with the publication of the *Carbon Footprint Calculator for Business Events in Tokyo* in March. This calculator helps meeting organisers understand their event’s environmental impact, so they can take specific measures



for sustainable management,” Kazuko tells us. TCVB also released the **Sustainability Guidelines for Business Events in Tokyo** and the **Sustainability Experience in Tokyo for International Conferences.**”The latter contains captivating programmes where participants can learn about local, sustainable initiatives and longevity efforts and even offers opportunities to contribute to the community, such as the **Paddling to protect** experience, where delegates can ride a rubber boat while cleaning local rivers. In line with these green policies, the TCVB also set up the **Sustainable Events Support Desk** this year, offering local organisers comprehensive and expert guidance on how to optimise sustainable events in Tokyo and providing relevant information on the services available.

Tech Guidelines and Robot Avatars

Hybrid format conferences can be held at most conference facilities in Tokyo, which have provided generous facilities subsidies, ensuring that the highest level of communications infrastructure can be used at events. In February, the TCVB, together with the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, organised a MICE Symposium with the aim of publicising the city’s efforts towards digital transformation in business events, while bringing them into line with international standards. “During the symposium, we outlined technology guidelines and presented 15 technologies,” says Kazuko. “Until recently, the use of high technology was not well established in the local business events industry and lacked instructions for

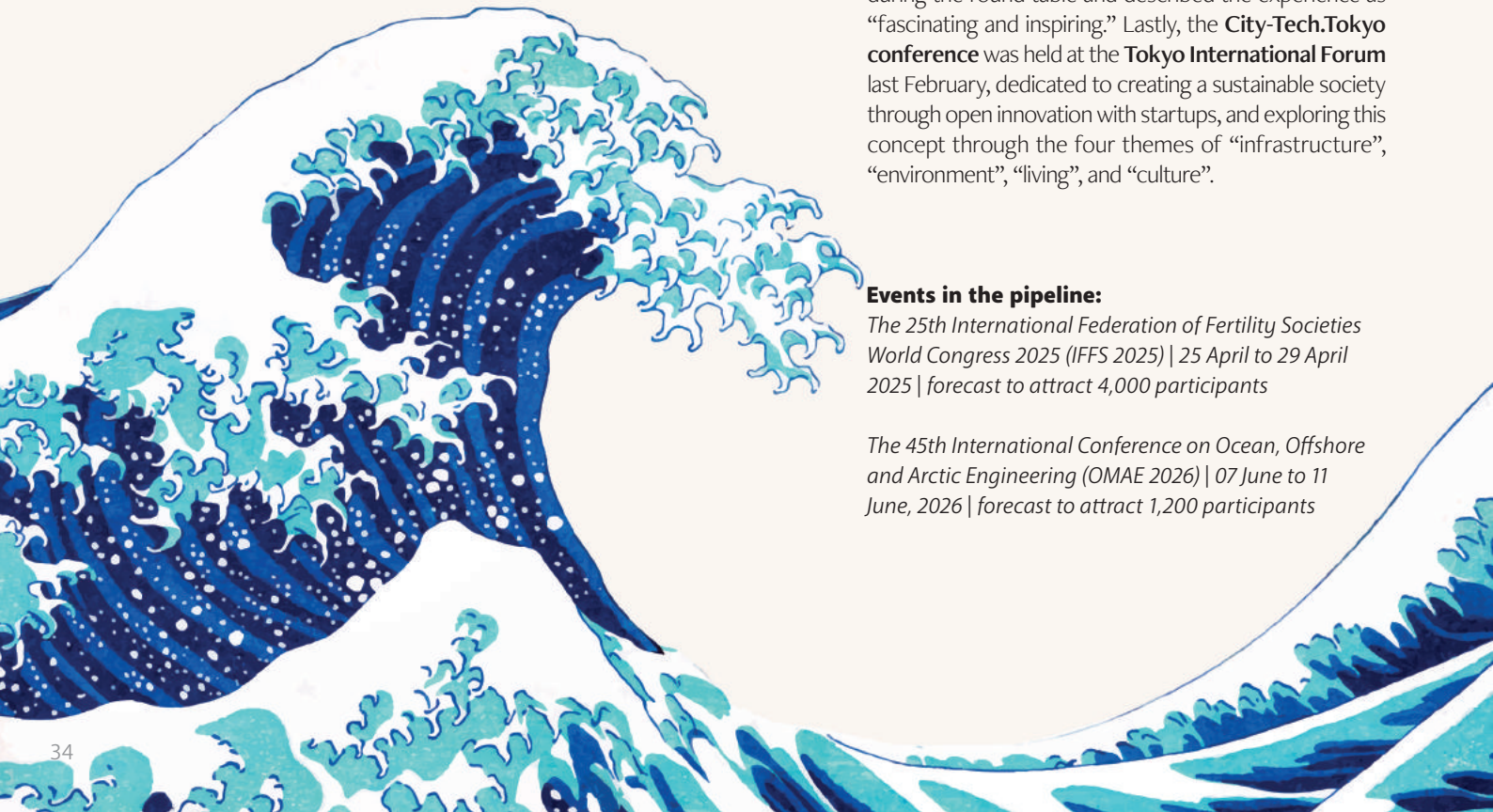
its use. However, through formulating these guidelines, we contacted manufacturers and held public demonstrations of how technology can streamline the business event planning, and, as a result, we were able to quickly establish connections between business events and technology industries.”

A prime example of the technological application was the **9th UIA Asia-Pacific Associations Roundtable 2021**, held for the first time in Japan. “We utilised iPresence Ltd. – a remote communications and advanced technology specialist group, providing advanced technological equipment, robotics, communication equipment, software, and related services,” said Kazuko. A unique demonstration of new telepresence robot avatars was presented during the panel discussions, showcasing a solution for managing international conferences in a hybrid format. The foreign speakers, who came together like robot avatars from Australia, Germany, Hong Kong and Switzerland, experienced a completely new way of communicating with local participants, made possible thanks to this innovative add-on. **Clara Fernández López, UIA External Relations Manager**, commented on this remote participation and the experience of performing on stage as a robot: “It was a great hybrid experience having the avatars on stage, which made everything fun. Moving the robot while facilitating panel discussion was a new challenge, but at the same time, I really enjoyed it, especially when we were able to walk around the lobby to meet the audience.” In-person participants mentioned “the strong presence of foreign participants” during the round table and described the experience as “fascinating and inspiring.” Lastly, the **City-Tech.Tokyo conference** was held at the **Tokyo International Forum** last February, dedicated to creating a sustainable society through open innovation with startups, and exploring this concept through the four themes of “infrastructure”, “environment”, “living”, and “culture”.

Events in the pipeline:

The 25th International Federation of Fertility Societies World Congress 2025 (IFFS 2025) | 25 April to 29 April 2025 | forecast to attract 4,000 participants

The 45th International Conference on Ocean, Offshore and Arctic Engineering (OMA E 2026) | 07 June to 11 June, 2026 | forecast to attract 1,200 participants





Free learning for association professionals at IMEX America

If you're an association leader and organize international meetings and events, then you need to be at **Association Leadership Forum, at IMEX America on Monday, October 16.**

Association Leadership Forum empowers association leaders to address the multiple challenges of association management and development.

Share your successes, connect with your peers and learn from others at our unique program created by ASAE: The Center for Association Leadership.



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Association Leadership Forum is an invitation only event - registration for IMEX America is required.





Kursaal Interlaken

Meetings Between Lakes and on Mountain Slopes!

Interlaken may not be your usual Swiss destination for an international congress, but it is undoubtedly one of the most memorable and charming. The town is small, but it boasts a stunning scenery surrounded by lakes and mountains that takes people away from that buzzing city lifestyle - which is why the **Swiss Economic Forum** brings its annual meeting to **Congress Kursaal Interlaken** every year.

Located between the lakes of Thun and Brienz, this Swiss commune is one of the country's postcards and a leading destination for outdoor activities due to the huge number of adventure sports available. Surrounded by mountains and lakes - its name means "between lakes" in German - Interlaken is much sought after by tourists all year round, but it is also becoming increasingly popular among delegates and business travellers. With the breathtaking scenery of the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau peaks forming part of a UNESCO-protected landscape, the towns and villages around the region are ideal bases for all types of incentive excursions in the rural environment of the Bernese Oberland, or lush events in the lively Interlaken. There, you will be able to experience a tradition of more than a hundred years as a venue for events in the historic rooms of the **Congress Kursaal Interlaken**, a proud member of the **Ten Swiss Convention Centres**, which have hosted countless major conferences and first-class banquets. With 5,000 m² of event space and 19 rooms, the Kursaal Interlaken is a first-rate venue to hold a modern-day meeting thanks to the magnificent historical focus that is interwoven with the ultra-modern vision within the technology planning, sustainable applications and team-building activities. Another major advantage is that you get a full package from a single source, with the local bureau - which is none other than Kursaal itself - taking care of

social programmes, transportation, bookings.

In 2019, the Kursaal celebrated its 160th anniversary, but as we know today, what came afterwards was not much to celebrate. "In 2020, we still tried to capture some events adapted to the new regulations, but in November 2020 we decided to close for the winter in order to apply for economic aid from the government," says **Bea Brunner, Team Leader Sales of the Kursaal Interlaken**. "However, we hosted the first medical congress on 21 June 2021 with a special licence of 300 people in-house and the rest hybrid. Then we started to pick up activity with events at the end of August but still subject to regulatory restrictions, which made the organisation very complicated." The last two winters of the pandemic continued to be difficult, until in the second half of 2022 activity began to show the first signs of recovery... "however, we still had a negative figure in 2022." Much of the reason for the progress that followed was due to the many Swiss congresses that quickly returned to their meeting rooms - in June 2021, for example, they hosted the annual meeting of the **Swiss Society of Gynaecology and Obstetrics**. When it comes to event security, they don't credit the pandemic as a reason for implementing security plans, as the venue is used to hosting a lot of political events where the safety of delegates is essential. "Every year we





hold the **Swiss Economic Forum**, where many high-level international politicians are invited as speakers on site. And in March, the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** held its session to approve the Synthesis Report to the Sixth Assessment Report, which was attended by around 650 political delegates from around the world.” Additionally, The Swiss Economic Forum offers different legacy projects, such as the SEF.NextGen, which invites young entrepreneurs aged between 18 and 24 to take part in a camp to exchange ideas with successful start-ups and big names from the business community, and **SEF Academy**, a special programme for young entrepreneurs, junior politicians and scientists.

The CKI Group was reformed in January 2022 by structuring Kursaal Interlaken Holding AG as the parent company of the subsidiaries Congress Kursaal Interlaken AG and Casino Interlaken AG (CI) with new management. “The aim is to position ourselves in the market as the ideal venue for holding general meetings, business gatherings and other events with a more efficient management system.” Another point to be implemented in the future concerns cultural events: “We want to take advantage of our low season for congresses and seminars to hold cultural events in our venue as well. We’ll start with a comedy week in Kursaal Interlaken in February 2024.” Interlaken is not a typical convention city, but is instead made up of three municipalities – Interlaken, Matten and Unterseen – which all together make up around 16,000 inhabitants. **Made in Bern**, the cantonal tourism marketing organisation in the city of Bern, chairs a council of all tourism directors, including Interlaken. On

an operational level, Interlaken has a MICE competence centre that meets four times a year with Made in Bern and all other MICE stakeholders to decide how to market the MICE sector properly. In terms of accessibility, the venue is physically accessible to people with disabilities, with equipment adapted with ramps, lifts and restrooms – and the surrounding hotels also follow suit.

To broadcast a congress anywhere in the world with HDTV projections, LED lighting technology, live streaming or on-demand, Kursaal has the latest lighting, sound, multimedia and conferencing technology, as well as the know-how of a specialised in-house team. “It’s an advantage that we have an in-house technical department, which is always up to date with the latest technological trends, and a good cooperation with partners for technical equipment that we don’t have on site,” says Brunner. Sustainability has also been an ongoing process in reducing the venue’s environmental impact for years. A member of the “Swisstainable” sustainability programme (*read HQ #109*), Kursaal Interlaken draws on the River Aare to cool the auditorium, sources electricity locally in Interlaken from eco-friendly Swiss hydroelectric power stations. The food & beverage supply also follows sustainable standards for sourcing seasonal and regional produce. “The influx of delegates generates clear economic benefits for the local community. We are in a mountainous region and this economic boost can lead to improved infrastructure, increased job opportunities and improved quality of life for residents. In addition, we organise several different Swiss medical congresses, promoting new talents and the latest research findings,” Brunner concludes.





Meeting Trophy 2023

Showcase of Swiss Quality!

Organised by **Switzerland Convention & Incentive Bureau**, the 17th edition of the **Meeting Trophy**, an annual signature competition for meeting and incentive travel planners, took place in June this year. Team Belgium took home the trophy for the 5th time! Seven international teams (80 industry professionals) participated in this unconventional rally. **Engadin St. Moritz** and **Zürich Tourism** showcased the best examples of Swiss quality event destinations this year! *Vivian Xu reports*

Explore the top of the world

St. Moritz is undoubtedly one of the most famous resorts in the world. Known as the birthplace of Alpine winter tourism since 1864 and renowned for successfully hosting the Winter Olympics twice, St. Moritz has proven to the world its capacity to host international events. The well-established **Swiss Travel System** provides reliable and comfortable train connections from Zurich Airport to St. Moritz.

HQ was fortunate enough to be a part of Team Belgium and had the privilege to experience a scenic train coach ride from Chur to St. Moritz. This 100-year-old train coach is available for outstanding and exclusive events.

Our first stop was the **Hotel Nira Alpina**, one of the most unique hotels in the Swiss Alps. This four-star resort offers 70 guest rooms and suites within touching distance of snow-capped mountains and pure, glassy lakes. Nira Alpina is equipped with a luxurious wellness centre, a business lounge with an exceptional view, and, last but not least, their rooftop restaurant is an ideal event space that we were able to experience first-hand! The Meeting Trophy's opening reception was hosted here, and through the panoramic window, a summer storm put on a show to welcome the international guests.

At an altitude of 1,800 metres, Lake St. Moritz, surrounded by imposing mountains and jade-blue mineral waters, reflects the light of the sky, which gives the lake face a captivating golden hue. How quiet and peaceful! Needless to say, the lake is a paradise for bikers and sailing lovers. After a 15-minute cable car ride, we reached the heart of the famous skiing and hiking area, **Corviglia**. Travellers looking for a perfect place to stop by should check out the **Hotel Restaurant Salastrains** and its bird's eye view of the Engadin Valley. Get ready to be impressed!

St. Moritz's chic and elegant status can be traced back to 1864, and **Kulm Hotel St. Moritz** is one of the most significant historical hotels in the village. The famous "WinterBet" in 1864 brought the first group of British tourists, marking the start of winter tourism in the whole Alps. The hotel boasts the largest ballroom in St. Moritz and the oldest sports bar in the Alps (Sunny Bar); it offers the ideal setting and ambience for a successful professional event or an unforgettable celebratory occasion. The hotel is currently under renovation, but worry not – it will reopen with 150 guest rooms next winter.

Diavolezza is a must-go for people willing to explore the authentic high Alpine glacier experience. **The Mountain Restaurant Diavolezza** provides the opportunity to dine with a panoramic view of the 4,000-metre Piz Bernina and Piz Palù. Visitors can enjoy sipping locally-produced Swiss wine, dipping into the fondue while listening to Alphorn's mellow and powerful sound in front of a breathtaking scenery. What a 360-degree Swiss experience!

A sweet taste of Zurich

The journey to Zurich started with an enchanting experience of electric cars provided by **Europcar Switzerland**. The ease of driving and the silence of the electric cars allowed us to enjoy the three-hour road trip from the mountaintop to the Zurich Lakeside. Greeted by the rich scent of cocoa, we arrived at the **Lindt Home of Chocolate**, the largest chocolate museum in Switzerland. Located in **Kilchberg**, the factory features a large pilot plant displaying a modern production line of chocolate, the world's biggest Lindt chocolate shop and tailor-made event planning services. Lindt Home of Chocolate is ready to enhance your event experience. Before you go, take a sweet break at the café and enjoy the tempting treats.

From Kilchberg to Zurich, a two-hour dining boat ride worked out perfectly with a three-course menu and





the stunning Zurich Lake view; participants were well rested and ready to explore the old town of Zurich. As Switzerland's largest city, the history of this German-speaking city dates back to the Romans. Today's Zurich is famous for its economic centre and home to many international companies. Moreover, Zurich is also a university city with 20 universities, colleges and institutions of higher education, such as the **University of Zurich**, the **Pedagogical College**, the **Zurich University of Applied Sciences** and the **Zurich University of the Arts**.

Overlooking the Zurich Lake, **8008 See Lounge** is an original event venue and a perfect spot to enjoy the fantastic view over an aperitif or a romantic candlelit dinner with an unforgettable sunset. The See Lounge is also a multifunctional event location, where the Meeting Trophy's farewell evening and awards ceremony took place. Whether in the shipyard hall, on the terrace or on the roof, the lounge can accommodate up to 400 people.

Team Belgium was crowned this year's winner led by the unstoppable determination, motivation, and excellent leadership of the team's host, **Myriam Winnepenninckx, Manager Meetings & Incentives** at the Switzerland Convention & Incentive Bureau.

"Everything was organised to its perfection. It was a unique experience and an interesting way to get to know Switzerland as an event destination. I enjoyed the spontaneous friendliness, the hospitality and the magnificent landscapes it has to offer", said **Eline Vanstraelen, Incentive Manager at Fame Travel Design**. "Great destination, fantastic partners and fun participants. What an amazing way to discover Switzerland. Pampered from beginning till end, from the mountains to the lakes... I was proud to be part of this experience and to be part of the winning Team Belgium!" concluded **Dirk De Craeye, Global Supplier Relations Ambassador & Senior Meeting Planner at American Express, Global Business Travel M&E**.

All photos © Mattias Nutt



Understanding Trust as the Ultimate Currency: **Association Leadership Forum** at **IMEX America 2023**

Trust. Slow to build and quick to lose. It's nonetheless one of the most prized assets a business can nurture – the “ultimate currency”. That's according to the latest Edelman Trust Barometer, which will be showcased at the **Association Leadership Forum**, created by **ASAE** and sponsored by **Amsterdam Convention Bureau**.

Taking place at IMEX America on Monday, October 16, the Association Leadership Forum recognises that the issues facing associations today are far from straightforward. The invite-only programme has been created especially for association leaders and association events professionals looking for a way to navigate these complex challenges.

How building trust can support associations

“Understanding trust as the ultimate currency” is the title of this year's Forum in which **Dan Webber, President of Edelman's Washington D.C. office**, and **Kari Butcher, MD of Edelman Data and Intelligence**, will explore the latest Barometer research, pinpointing the core drivers of trust and how to excel in earning them.

“In a time when trust in institutions ranging from governments to media is eroding, we thought it was essential to look at the ways associations can work to build trust with their boards, volunteers, members, and the public,” explains **Michelle Mason, FASAE, CAE, President & CEO**.

Carina Bauer, CEO of the IMEX Group, adds: “For an association, fostering ongoing trust with stakeholders – volunteers, staff and members – in turn builds credibility, loyalty and engagement. These are the strong foundations an organisation needs to succeed and grow.”

Global suppliers & learning opportunities

Following the Association Leadership Forum, IMEX America continues until October 19 with an impressive range of global suppliers – venues, destinations, hotels and more – for association planners to meet.

Increased engagement from previous and new North American exhibitors means the area of the show dedicated to the USA is set to be bigger than ever. Arizona, Boston, Chicago, LA, Miami, New Orleans, San Francisco and Seattle have all expanded their booth space, and Denver will have its largest-ever booth.

Destinations from across Europe and the Middle East are strongly represented. They include the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Malta, Monaco, Spain and Dubai. Wales is among the destinations exhibiting for the first time. Likewise, Asia Pacific makes a marked return to the show with Seoul, Tokyo and Taiwan amongst those confirmed so far.

Alongside the global destinations, all the major hotel groups will be present, including Accor, Hilton, Hyatt, Four Seasons, Marriott, Radisson and Wyndham.

With the event technology sector going through massive change in recent years, including the rapid adoption of AI, attendees will discover a wide choice of providers offering event platforms, chatbots, analytics and apps designed to respond to current market needs. Cvent, EventMobi, Fielddrive, RefTech and STOVA are among the tech companies confirmed so far.

Building on the learning at the Association Leadership Forum, there are opportunities to dive deeper throughout the show. This year's education and experiential programming features both old favourites and brand-new concepts. Attendees can expect informal, inclusive and entertaining formats covering four core areas: Respect for People and Planet; Future Self; Innovation and Creativity and Event Planner Toolkit. These all take place on the show floor's Inspiration Hub, sponsored by Webex.

IMEX America takes place at the Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas, October 17 – 19, with Smart Monday, powered by MPI on Monday, October 16.

Register for free at www.imexamerica.com





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ASSOCIATION & PCO

Hybrid Meetings: Are They Worth it?

While the hybrid meeting format has been a hot topic in the events industry for quite some time, arguably, the Covid pandemic offered this format an opportunity to shine. Where physical attendance was very limited or downright impossible, many event organisers turned to hybrid or strictly online as a solution.

So, the question now is, do hybrid/online meetings work? Are they effective? To try to answer these questions, partners at the World PCO Alliance were asked their opinion. In this article, they share their experiences through two case studies.

Case Study #1: The 15th World Congress of the World Federation of Direct Selling Associations

CDM Thailand was the selected PCO for this congress, which had originally been confirmed for Bangkok in 2020, and then postponed twice. The event finally took place in October 2021 in an exclusively online format, with 1,300 registered attendees.

The congress adopted the following format:

- The length of the congress was compressed into two half-days.
- All speeches, sessions, and sponsor presentations were pre-recorded.
- The sessions were broadcast each day at a designated time to facilitate attendance from the time zones most represented: Asia Pacific, North America, and South America.
- For those attendees from other time zones or for those who, for one reason or another, could not attend a live session, recordings were available on-demand for two months following the congress.
- The congress offered live simultaneous translation in Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Thai through separate channels.
- There was a virtual exhibition featuring online shopping with special promotions.

Despite the online format, the congress wanted to optimise opportunities for interaction. To accomplish this, the following interactive features were implemented:

- The congress hosted a musical performance by Song Division, who composed a special song for the congress.
- Exhibitors could host live appointments with attendees.
- Live chats were enabled with panellists appearing during broadcasts of their sessions, a feature that worked very well, as delegates were able to reconnect, share ideas and maintain contact after Covid.
- There was an online “lucky draw” each day.

Looking back, **Patranuch Sudasna of CDM Thailand** points out the major benefit of the congress’s online format: due to a lower registration fee, the congress attracted more delegates, which also enriched the congress programme by delivering the key takeaways of each session to a broader audience.

Some areas that could have been improved include the lack of a live Q&A with the panellists. Due to the shorter duration of the congress, the programme was very packed, and while event participants were indeed able to have “live chats” with the speakers, due to time limitations, no further interaction, such as that offered in a typical Q&A, was possible. Appointments made at the virtual exhibit also fell short of expectations.

Overall, Sudasna maintains that hybrid is a good added value element for an international event, while still focusing on creating unique and memorable experiences for in-person attendees. For any congress considering a virtual/hybrid format, CDM Thailand recommends that organisers focus on tactics/solutions to maximize attendance, facilitate different time zones, and offer perks that will attract sponsors.

Case Study #2: The 7th World One Health Congress

Ace:Daytons Direct was the appointed PCO for the 7th World One Health Congress, held at the **Sands Expo and Convention Centre**, Singapore, in November 2022. The hybrid event spanned five days, featuring seven parallel sessions and adopting a fully hybrid format. Hailing from 76 countries, attendees totalled over 1,500 in-person participants and over 1,000 virtual attendees.

Particular features of the online portion of the congress included:

- All virtual speakers recorded their presentations as a backup; however, many also opted to attend as virtual presenters, engaging in Q&A sessions.
- The congress featured an E-poster Gallery, where posters were uploaded onto the virtual platform for viewing and interaction between delegates and presenters.
- All sessions across different rooms were streamed live to the virtual audience.
- All recorded content was accessible to all participants for one month after the congress.

To optimise opportunities for interaction, the congress offered the following:

- All attendees, in-person and virtual, could schedule appointments with exhibitors and fellow participants.
- The “virtual lobby” led to the exhibition hall with interactive virtual booths, accessible to both in-person and virtual attendees.
- Exhibitors were able to interact with participants via chat, 1:1 video conferencing calls, digital name cards and material downloads.
- All attendees could engage in interactive networking video conferencing calls, connect at the virtual “coffee corner,” and socialise via 1:1 video conferencing.
- The virtual environment facilitated chat interactions between virtual and in-person attendees, speakers, and exhibitors.

- There was interactive polling, Q&A sessions, and virtual name card exchanges.

Additional considerations to accommodate the hybrid format included:

Managing the costs of a hybrid congress: combining the virtual components, including the required technical equipment and platforms as well as the additional personnel to exclusively manage the virtual component of the event added significant costs to the event. To ensure a seamless experience for both in-person and virtual participants, Ace:Daytons Direct created three distinct teams that functioned as one cohesive unit: a virtual team, a physical team, and a team on-site comprised of members from the virtual platform team as well as digital event strategists. This facilitated the smooth transmission of the physical and virtual components of the congress to its virtual attendees. The administrative aspect of running a hybrid event proved paramount to the event’s success.

Having the right technical equipment: to host a successful hybrid event, you need to have all the necessary tools. For the World One Health Congress, the following equipment was implemented:

- The vMix platform allowed the integration of multiple elements, such as cameras, videos, and NDI (Network Device Interface) sources.
- vMix call functionality enabled speaker engagement and interaction.
- Zoom was used as a backup solution in case speakers had problems logging into the vMix platform.
- Multi-camera set-up on-site was deployed to capture multiple angles and perspectives.

Providing a proper “welcome” and thorough instructions to virtual speakers and exhibitors: Hybrid event organisers must ensure that all virtual participants are properly briefed on the technical implications of their participation. In the case of the World One Health Congress, virtual speakers were briefed through the following:

- Comprehensive instructions for platform access and the feature navigations on the virtual platform.
- Following the technical briefing, virtual speakers received a “Get Ready for the Virtual Congress”

email, including instructions for uploading their presentation, a PowerPoint template, tips for a successful virtual appearance, and guidelines for recording their session.

- A unique access link was emailed to each speaker four days before the congress.

Virtual exhibitors were provided with the following:

- Comprehensive instructions were given to virtual exhibitors on uploading materials, booth set-up and usage, maximising outreach, and communicating with delegates.

Despite the thorough preparation, the congress did experience some challenges, namely:

An unstable Wi-Fi system: Some speakers experienced access issues due to their Wi-Fi problems, thus forcing the congress to play back their recorded presentations.

Last-minute speaker emergencies: Because speakers were not on-site, some of them had to step away for emergencies, forcing the congress to play their pre-recorded video.

Presentation materials submitted through multiple channels: In addition to uploading their video recordings and PowerPoint files, some speakers also sent their material through other links and even to the organisers. Ace:Daytons Direct had to invest the time to ensure that

the correct videos and PowerPoints were used for each speaker’s session.

This being said, the congress reaped some benefits from opting for the hybrid format:

- Through the use of on-demand videos, all participants were able to watch the sessions they missed, thus optimising the reach of the congress’s content.
- The congress was more inclusive, allowing the presence of participants from developing nations who did not necessarily have the resources to attend the congress in-person.

So, at the end of the day, did the hybrid format work for the World One Health Congress? Yes, says **Nancy Tan** from **Ace:Daytons Direct**. Hybrid is an excellent format given the opportunities that the format affords, namely having a wider reach in terms of participation and attracting participants who may have never otherwise attended the congress in person. Yet, there is no denying the additional costs of hosting a hybrid event, and conferences must keep their eye on the bottom line since it still represents an important income stream for many associations. If there’s room in the event budget, Tan strongly encourages events to explore the possibilities a partial or full hybrid event offers. With meticulous and strategic planning, hybrid events possess the capacity to elevate excellence, inclusivity, and to have a lasting impact on attendees.

The final verdict? Based on our two case studies, a strong argument can be made for the added value of integrating a hybrid/virtual component to any congress, particularly international ones. The extended reach to delegates that otherwise would not attend is alone a major benefit. It is worth mentioning that the purpose of any conference is to serve its professional community, and the in-person

attendee experience must be top-notch and unique, so as to incite more people to attend the event on-site as opposed to online.

That being said, if planned appropriately and strategically, hybrid events can reinforce their programmes’ quality, accessibility and memorability.



World PCO Alliance



Isn't **All** we do, **Hybrid**?

In meetings, hybridity is about bringing the in-person experience to the virtual attendees, as well as integrating digital technology into the on-site ground. Let's go back to the basics of the concept so that we can magnify the picture: hybridity refers to the combination of analogue and digital components. Regardless of whether we broadcast an event or not, there are both people and technological tools working together in all aspects of our operations. So, isn't everything we do hybrid in a way?

With this approach in mind, I reached out to our **Chief Information Officer, Uzi Drori**, who currently leads a team of 22 IT professionals, making sure that the operations of our 350 employees worldwide and the delivery of our association management and conference organising services are excellent, efficient, and innovative. With his more than 20 years of IT experience and a career of 15 years at Kenes Group, Uzi brought three main topics to the conversation: in-house developments, efficiency and time-saving, and technological implementations in events.

BY ESTEFANÍA ZÁRATE ANGARITA, MARCOM MANAGER AT KENES GROUP



In-house Developments

From registrations to scientific programme design, from membership engagement to industry support, every task has its own unique process, and each one of our departments' processes needs to be able to "talk to each other", as Uzi Drori mentioned while explaining the sophisticated flowchart of the data centre that is holding our operations together.

At least a dozen Software as a Service (SaaS) are part of our IT Toolkit (including Clarizen, Azure, Salesforce, NetSuite and more), all selected using a best-of-breed strategy and integrated through in-house developments. Nevertheless, the uniqueness of the work we do at Kenes Group calls for unique technological solutions.

Some of the recent in-house developments highlighted by our CIO are:

- **Private photo album:** using face recognition and artificial intelligence, delegates can receive a photo album with all their pictures captured during the event. Face recognition is also used for self-registration to decrease the registration time.
- **Abstract submission AI assistant:** enabling machine learning by feeding the AI assistant with all abstracts submitted, admitted and rejected throughout an association's history, attendees can get an estimation of the acceptance chances, a suggested title, observations on the English wording, length and punctuation remarks and suggested modifications. It also serves to better allocate abstracts to sessions.
- **Invited Speaker Portal:** one single place where all speakers can provide their biographical information as well as the content of their session and other relevant resources to minimise email exchange.
- **Exhibitor Portal:** designed to provide exhibitors with all the relevant information about their booth, as well as to gather exhibitors' logos, graphics, booth specifications and more. This also minimises the email exchange and streamlines the processes of the Exhibitions team.

In Uzi Drori's words, "Research and development means learning a lot about machine learning and artificial

intelligence and how to implement it, dealing with a lot of statistical and mathematical modules."

Efficiency and time-saving

"I love to save time for employees! If I see people struggling with daily routines and we can do something to save them days or more, that makes me smile at the end of the day", said Uzi Drori.

For example, this year, we implemented a new Enterprise Resource Planning system that automated many of our finance, registrations and hotel accommodation procedures.

Technological implementations in events

Recently, we held a conference in Chicago where only one member of our IT team travelled on-site to set up four halls with around seven kilos worth of equipment for each, while colleagues in Madrid and Tel Aviv operated the recordings remotely, from home. This allowed us to reduce the cost of the broadcast, have fewer people travelling on-site, and still deliver the same quality of hybrid coverage.

Currently, we are prioritising on-demand content over streaming, considering that with the current implementations, an already edited version of a session can be available on a congress portal within the next hour after the real-time presentation.

Mobile apps, E-posters and information touch screens are practically part of the DNA of our meetings today. Other technologies, such as augmented reality, which enables 3D elements during a presentation, are quickly making their way into our conferences.

“*Research and development means learning a lot about machine learning and artificial intelligence and how to implement it, dealing with a lot of statistical and mathematical modules*”

The Future of Events: The **Power of Personal Connection** in a Digital Era

AUTHOR: LEONIE TROGUS, SALES & MARKETING COORDINATOR AT CONGREX SWITZERLAND (IAPCO MEMBER)



Not long ago, the world was convinced that the future of events would be dominated by virtual and hybrid formats. The allure of online networking and the promise of digital exhibition booths were considered the ultimate formats that everyone wanted to see.

Over time, however, it became apparent that this vision did not quite convince participants and sponsors, especially in areas such as medicine. The dream of seamless online networking has proven less successful than expected, and digital exhibition booths have not lived up to expectations.

Nevertheless, amidst this evolving landscape, one important insight has emerged: the true potential of an event lies in the skilful blending of digital technology with the irreplaceable element of face-to-face interaction. The future of events lies in using digital technologies as a tool to strengthen personal exchange and thus create a fulfilling and enriching experience for all participants.

Hybrid Technology: Boundless Reach and Personal Connection

A key benefit of the hybrid conference is the ability to connect with extraordinary speakers from around the world – without the limitations of travel costs and schedules. Virtual platforms offer the chance to access expertise and knowledge from all over the globe. Experts can deliver their presentations online and interact with an international audience, taking the quality and diversity of conference content to a new level.

Personal Exchange: The Heartbeat of Events

Digital technologies are undoubtedly a valuable tool, giving us access to knowledge from all over the world. But technology cannot replace the human element that connects us. The power of personal exchange is

and remains indispensable – it is the heartbeat that brings events to life. So, ideally, the majority of speakers should be on-site, where the magic of personal connection happens. The interaction during physical meetings leads to spontaneous encounters, inspiring discussions and valuable networking opportunities. In an increasingly connected world, the personal touch is still particularly important, especially in a field that can involve sensitive information and complex discussions.

Looking Ahead: Virtual Reality and the Expanding Metaverse

To make hybrid events effective, the format must evolve. One promising development is the integration of Virtual Reality (VR) into booths and sessions, which could become a true game-changer for hybrid meetings. Remote attendees can be immersed in an experience that feels almost as real as being physically present. Imagine being able to attend a conference as if you were there without leaving your home. That would be a breakthrough experience that would be accessible to everyone, regardless of their location.

Moreover, the rapid emergence and ever-increasing accessibility of the metaverse will exponentially expand the scope of hybrid events. Endless opportunities for innovative and interactive content are on the horizon, shaping the conference landscape and offering participants a new world of collaboration and creative exchange.

But even with advances in technology and the advent of the metaverse, face-to-face exchanges will remain the cornerstone of a successful conference. The human element cannot be replicated by technology alone. Real connections, spontaneous meetings and the opportunity to meet experts face-to-face will continue



In an increasingly connected world, the personal touch is still particularly important, especially in a field that can involve sensitive information and complex discussions

to be the driving force for meaningful collaboration and professional growth. We are facing exciting changes in the events world and it is important to understand and embrace these new developments while preserving the fundamental human elements that make events so special.

Tips to Ensure an Outstanding Experience for All Participants:

- 1. Embrace hybrid technology:** integrate virtual platforms To connect with the best speakers from around the world and increase the variety and quality of conference content.
- 2. Invest in virtual reality experiences:** create immersive virtual booths and sessions that provide attendees with engaging and interactive experiences.
- 3. Increase face-to-face interaction:** favour on-site speakers to encourage stimulating discussions and valuable networking opportunities, especially in sensitive areas such as medicine.
- 4. Analyse data and feedback:** analysing performance data and feedback can help make continuous improvements to enhance the success of future events.
- 5. Explore the metaverse:** stay at the forefront of emerging technologies to expand event capabilities and meet the evolving needs of attendees.

Conclusion: A Harmonious Symbiosis for the Future of Events

In conclusion, the world may have once believed that digital and hybrid events would be the dominant format. The truth, however, is that the power of face-to-face exchanges and connections remains undeniable, especially in the medical field. While hybrid conferences offer exciting opportunities to connect with experts, the true potential lies in combining the best of both worlds – harnessing digital exchanges and VR experiences while maintaining the magic of face-to-face encounters. As technology evolves and the metaverse becomes more widespread, we can expect to see significant changes in the events landscape. This brave new world will offer endless opportunities for innovative and interactive content, shaping the conference environment in ways we can only begin to imagine. But amidst these technological leaps, one fundamental truth remains unchanged: the essence of human connection, with its spontaneity, authenticity and ability to inspire, will forever be the heartbeat of a successful conference.

IAPCO is a global not-for-profit membership organisation whose mission is to raise the standards of service amongst its members and other sectors of the meetings and events industry by means of continuing education, interaction with other professionals and research. IAPCO today represents 138 accredited businesses of professional congress organisers in 40 countries. IAPCO membership is achieved through the demonstration of a continual high level of service delivery and is retained through annual quality checks and reviews by the IAPCO Quality Committee.



Embracing **Optimism** and Building a **Positive Destination**

Every day, we hear about the doom and gloom of global polycrisis. But there is a case to make for more of the right kind of optimism. More efficient progress can be made if we believe in the possibility of positive change. This sentiment sets the stage for an exceptional gathering in the attractive city of Valencia. From October 3-7, 2023, the **GDS-Forum and City Destinations Alliance Autumn Conference** will put together forward-thinkers and visionaries to unite in pursuit of a brighter future.

A Pledge to Optimism and Collective Action

The City Destinations Alliance Autumn Conference rises against the backdrop of global polycrisis, challenging the status quo with an essential question: can optimism pave the way for efficient progress? Hosted under the theme **Building Blocks for Destination Positive**, this event will redefine the narrative from despair to hope. Attendees are invited to explore the transformative power of **WeGeneration** – the collective pursuit of positive impact – in shaping better cities and destinations.

GDS-Forum: Transforming Mindsets for Future-Proof Destinations

The 2023 GDS-Forum marks a pivotal convergence for those determined to future-proof destinations. This event will rise above conventional boundaries by not only discussing transformation from the outside but also catalysing change from within. Sustainable leadership, collaboration, and innovation will become the cornerstones of the forum’s discourse.

Global destination leaders and sustainability champions will partake in an unprecedented exchange of ideas. The GDS-Forum will serve as a melting pot of insights, where discussions on sustainability strategies, impact practices, and the evolution of the GDS-Index journeys will take centre stage. Participants will co-create innovative approaches, ushering in a new era of regenerative destination management.

City Destinations Alliance Autumn Conference: Unveiling Destination Positive

In April 2023, City Destinations Alliance unveiled its **Welcoming WeGeneration** mission in a new era of net-positive tourism for Europe’s urban destinations. This mission will take flight in October as participants converge in Valencia to explore the ongoing work of WeGeneration

– a collaborative endeavour aimed at driving positive impact and transformation.

As the event unfolds, the focus will shift to the building blocks of WeGenerative, socially sustainable cities. Discussions will navigate through “*valuegraphics*”, “*datafeminism*”, community engagement, sensory experiences, and more. The fundamental question emerges: how can we design destinations that prioritise the well-being and positive experiences of all?

Building Blocks for Destination Positive

In the collaborative journey into **Destination Positive**, attendees will have to shift from looming challenges to the potential of positive change. Can embracing the right kind of optimism drive collective action? From the opening keynote speaker and senior lecturer at the University of Glasgow, **Rhys Williams**, who explored the Solarpunk movement, which advocates the right kind of optimism, imagination and creative vision to create hope for a “unshitty future” and drive real transformation, to Professor **Xavier Font** of the University of Surrey’s demonstration of the importance of decarbonisation in shaping a positive destination, by comparing long-haul vs short-haul, these sessions will delve into mindset shifts



Building Blocks for
DESTINATION POSITIVE



GDS-Forum & CityDNA Au

Valencia
October 3-7



and strategies crucial for a thriving, positive future.

Creating People-Positive Destinations

The conference will shift to crafting socially sustainable cities, exploring urban belonging, sensory experiences, diversity, and shared spaces. The central question: how to design people-positive destinations? **David Allison**, Founder of the Valuegraphics Project, will introduce value-based approaches for positive communities and how to turn human values into data and why David has declared the end of demographics and welcomed a new era of valuegraphics in a values-driven world. **Sofie Burgos-Thorsen**, an Industrial PhD Fellow at Aalborg University, will give a keynote on mapping the sense of belonging and lived experience of a city with under-represented communities. **Alison Brooks**, Vice-President of Destination Experience & Advocacy at Visit Mesa, will present how Visit Mesa became a leading autism-certified city, and the development of full-sensory destination experiences to make Mesa accessible, inviting, and inclusive for everyone.

Tech Positive Cities: A Glimpse into the Future

The exploration will also delve into the technological possibilities that can reshape cities and destinations. In a departure from dystopian narratives, sessions will immerse participants in the potential of AI and advanced algorithms to enable comprehensive, participatory urban planning and co-design. The session, led by **Damiano Cerrone**, Co-Founder of UrbanistAI promises to shift the discourse from fear to excitement about technology's role in our future.

Build better Cities with Community and Culture

From the impact of music on everyday urban life to the making of places by people connected and cultures shared, this session will explore culture and community as essential building blocks of cities and shared cityscapes. **Shain Shapiro**, Founder of Sound Diplomacy & Center for Music Ecosystems will share on music for better cities, **Csaba Faix**, CEO of Budapest Brand will speak about engaging community in Budapest Tuning – citizen-initiated festivals and events for better communities, and **Anne-Signe Fagereng**, Director of Marketing at VisitOSLO will talk about the synergy of culture, community and tourism – and the power of unplanned attraction that opens your city in new ways.

Empowering Resident Well-being through Regenerative Development

The conference will end with a profound discussion on regenerative development and resident well-being. **Marta Mills** and **Peter Jordan** from TOPOSOPHY will guide this dialogue, offering practical strategies to enhance quality of life, economic opportunities, and infrastructure. With **Geerte Udo** from amsterdam&partners and **Els Van Zele** from Visit Mechelen as two of the distinguished panellists, this session will paint a vivid picture of how regenerative practices can shape thriving communities.

From Dream to Reality: Building Towards Destination Possible

In a world often dominated by cynicism, the GDS-Forum and City Destinations Alliance Autumn Conference 2023 stand as beacons of optimism. They call upon attendees to believe in the possibility of positive change and to actively participate in crafting a better future. These events aren't just conferences; they are catalysts for transformation, building blocks that lay the foundation for a destination that is not just positive but possible.

Henry Ford's words echo through the halls of these events: "Whether you think you can, or you think you can't – you are right." With determination and the right mindset, the vision of Destination Positive can shift from dream to reality. As attendees gather in Valencia, they embark on a journey of collaboration, learning, and inspiration, setting the stage for a future that is not defined by challenges, but by the possibilities we collectively dare to imagine.

More information on <http://citydestinationsalliance.eu>



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Member Survey Results

As every year, **AIPC** – in partnership with **Access Intelligence** – performs a global members survey, focusing on six key aspects, from industry performance to client behaviour. This year's report resulted in seven key insights, which you will find below, and which have been shared with our members during the **AIPC Annual Conference**, which took place in Luxembourg at the start of the summer.

AUTHORS: MICHAEL HUGHES, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH & CONSULTING WITH ACCESS INTELLIGENCE, LLC & SVEN BOSSU, CEO AIPC

Insight #1

The recovery is stronger than expected. The average in-person attendance recovery for events held in 2023 compared to 2019 has been 86% globally, compared to 64% last year. This recovery has been much better than expected according to 32% of members, and better than expected by 40%. One-quarter of the membership said the recovery has proceeded just as expected, and only 3% said it has been worse than they thought during the depths of the pandemic.

Insight #2

There is a clear confidence that the events and meetings industry will thrive over the next few years. A significant 85% of members feel very confident that the events and meetings industry will be healthy and growing over the next two to three years. This result suggests that most members do not expect a major recession, or that even if there is a recession, the industry's rebound trajectory will still provide growth and expansion.

Insight #3

There has been a shift regarding risks impacting business growth. The top five risks seen potentially impacting specific centre business are overall economic performance (61%), competition from other centres/regions (56%), air travel issues (52%), hotel availability and pricing (35%), and sustainability and environmental issues (27%). Last year, the survey found that international conflict and air travel costs/ disruptions were the biggest risks to the convention centres' business. Besides war and other international conflicts, event and group re-booking and re-scheduling challenges had been rated the third top concern in 2022.

Insight #4 will not come as a surprise

Over half of members worldwide have raised their published rates for venue services and exhibition hall rental – and many other major strategic business changes have been made post-pandemic. These involved the creation of new services or lines of business (42%) or changes in their

marketing focus (39%).

Insight #5

As far as costs are concerned, once again it will come as no surprise that inflation is a key area of concern. 75% of members worldwide are experiencing some level of inflation. And inflation is most pronounced in Europe, as 88% of European members report that they have seen major price increases continuing to impact their core budget areas related to venue management or event services-related costs. Worldwide, most inflation and increasing costs are in these areas: energy, gas, and electricity; staff compensation; food and beverage and related supplies and services; and other goods, materials and services.

Insight #6

Staff recruitment and retention remain a challenge. 58% of members say recruiting and retaining suitable employees is extremely/very challenging, only slightly down on the 60% of members who said this in 2022. Labor markets are tight in many parts of the world and member centres are suffering the effects. Based on member feedback, some of the responses to the challenging labour market include streamlining the recruitment and onboarding process, often using technology, increasing salaries, offering flexible schedules, enhanced training, and working with colleges and universities to promote job opportunities.

And finally insight #7

Convention centres are changing their sales and marketing strategies and practices. These involve stronger partnership, strengthening sales teams, flexible pricing and a greater focus on sustainability.

In conclusion, the AIPC members are confident about the future and are adapting on many fronts to comply with a changing business environment, making convention centres great places to work.





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Hybrid Events: Two Chances to Make a **Great First Impression**

Remember all those things we did during the pandemic that we thought we would never have to deal with again once things “got back to normal”?

The isolation created by no one going to the office but still everyone having to be as productive as before. The weeks gone by when you could wear anything you wanted (below the waist) while attending a staff meeting via Zoom. The amount of work you thought you would get done because you had so many fewer interruptions.

One of the adjustments we made during that time, which we (the association and meeting industries) were sure would be temporary, was the effort to provide **virtual events**, and their offspring, **hybrid events**. For a while, everything was virtual only, so we had to develop the skills to provide these events with the highest possible level of quality and availability. As the pandemic began to diminish, we eased into hybrid meetings to accommodate those who still were reluctant to be exposed to potential health hazards.

Now, here we are a couple of years later, and in-person attendance is going back up and, in some cases, already approaching or exceeding pre-Covid levels. So, are we back to normal?

Yes, but hybrid meetings are here to stay – they are a part of the new normal for every organisation. Members, delegates, and meeting attendees have become accustomed to having the choice of participating in-person or virtually for almost every event. To put it bluntly, they got “spoiled” during the pandemic, and now it is not considered special treatment to be a virtual attendee at any function.

Now, the pressure is on for organisations worldwide to present meetings and conferences that offer in-person and virtual attendees an equally valuable and engaging experience. Virtual attendees can no longer be an afterthought. Meeting their participation expectations requires as much, or perhaps even more, planning and thought than the experience we are providing in-person attendees.

Here are some of the best ways to ensure that your virtual attendees get the experience they want, and for which they are willing to pay an equal fee as in-person attendees:



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Levin, CAE, CSP has more than 20 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.



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Increase your events budget for enhanced technology

If we want virtual attendees to feel they are getting equal value for their participation, we must be prepared to provide the very best technical systems. This means doing more homework on what the best systems are, and being prepared to hire outside companies, as many in-house audio-visual providers don't have the latest equipment or tech support.

Remember that your organisation is “guilty by association” with these audio-visual and technology providers. The equipment can often be very expensive to rent, so be prepared to find ways to fund it in your event budget. Try creating a Technology Sponsorship category, where a company can be recognised for providing some (or all) of the technological upgrades. Where necessary, include the increased cost of this top-level audio-visual and technology equipment in the registration fees. Everyone benefits from this commitment to quality, so adding this cost of upgrading to the registration fee makes sense.

Set standards for your speakers and presenters

Don't let your commitment to a top-quality virtual event be diminished because your speakers and presenters aren't as tech-savvy as your staff/providers. Include in your speaker agreement a requirement that all speakers and presenters (even your volunteer/member speakers) use your equipment for their presentations. Include written instructions or a link to a short video that describes what equipment you'll be providing and how to use it. Include also a requirement to practice with the equipment a minimum amount of time prior to their actual presentation.

Another standard you should set for your speakers is what level of engagement and participation for virtual attendees you expect the speaker to provide. You can suggest such things as a minimum number of interactive activities, surveys, question opportunities, etc. Note: It is perfectly acceptable to establish expectations for your speakers. Volunteer/member speakers need to know these expectations in order to prepare properly. Professional (paid) speakers will appreciate your attention to quality control and work with you to meet those expectations in any way they can.

Be constantly reminding participants of the benefits they are getting

Don't wait until you send your post-event evaluation forms to give attendees a chance to think about whether the money and time it took to participate was worthwhile. Use the available technologies to engage both in-person and virtual attendees throughout the event. Stop at pre-determined spots in the meeting and take online surveys of attendees. You can use the chat function or an online system to ask them to list or describe the most useful information, ideas, or contacts they have gained at your event (so far).

Other ideas include:

- Short interviews with attendees asking what value they are getting from the event – have these short clips posted on your website and event app.
- If you are having a multi-day event, begin the next day's activities with a summary of the previous day's best ideas and other take-away value. Use testimonials you have recorded the previous day to be part of the summary.

Pay extra attention to first-time attendees

Every organisation does something special to ensure that first-time attendees receive some sort of recognition at events. This includes things such as special first-time ribbons on name tags, first-time receptions, introducing first-time attendees at functions, etc. But what about your first-time virtual attendees? Too often, we neglect to do anything special for these people, and their first impression is just as important as the in-person first-time attendees.

You can introduce them on screen, ask them to introduce themselves during interactive sessions, include them in your interviews, and hold a virtual first-time attendee event just prior to the conference's official opening. At this event, you can do a first-time attendee orientation, answer questions first-time attendees often have, do a real-time survey of their expectations, and get to know them a little better.

Holding a hybrid meeting presents both challenges and opportunities. The greatest challenge is using technology to provide a seamless level of top-quality value for all attendees.

The greatest opportunity lies in the fact that we have two chances to make a great first impression – one with the virtual attendees, and one with the in-person attendees. Be sure to make a commitment to impress both groups.

VAT and Hybrid Events in the European Union

How were the hybrid events born?

The world of events has known a lot of turmoil in recent years because of the pandemic and the imposed travel restrictions. The events industry had to adapt, and so virtual events took that place, becoming the “new normal” in the two years that followed.

AUTHOR: OUMAR COUNTA, DIRECTOR OF TAX DEPARTMENT AT BC&A.



In the pre-pandemic years, events were mainly organised in person and the VAT rules for participation were clear and set.

When the crisis ended and it became safe to travel again and meet in-person, events were organised physically again, but organisers kept virtual participation because it was more suitable for some participants; in fact, it brought more revenue and notoriety to their events.

Hybrid events have become the new trend. The sector has changed a lot recently, and although businesses have adapted quickly, VAT rules have also become difficult to keep up with.

Since the VAT rules for sponsorships and exhibitions are the same, regardless of how the event is organised, this article focuses solely on the taxation of attendees. At the same time, since corporate events do not deal with registration, this article only concerns events where participation is open to anyone who wants to attend.

How the VAT applies for different types of participation

1. On-site participation

EU legislators have clearly established the taxation of participation in physical events (*Council Directive 2008/8/EC – articles 53 and 54*).

Admission for both taxable and non-taxable persons is subject to VAT in the country where the event physically takes place.

For instance, if a congress is organised in Italy, all in-person attendees are invoiced with 22% Italian VAT.

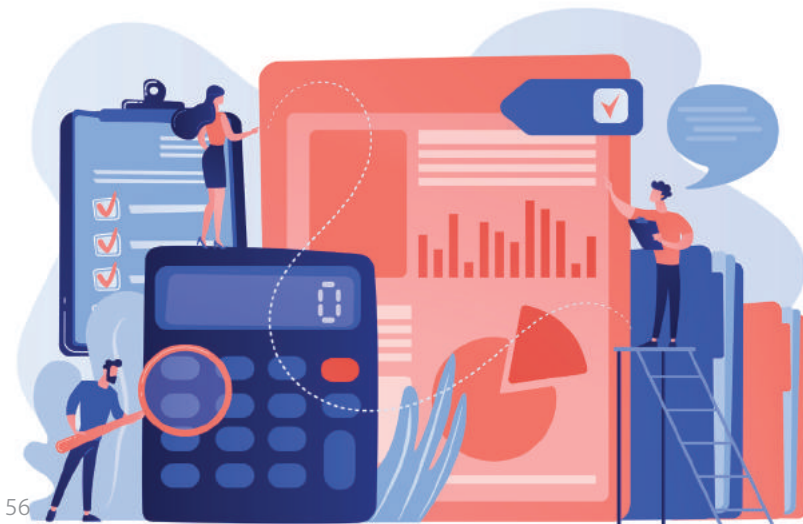
2. Virtual attendees when the event is organised fully online

The generalisation of virtual events during the pandemic found the EU legislator somewhat unprepared.

Organisers only had clear VAT rules for the electronically supplied services, defined as “services which are delivered over the Internet or an electronic network and the nature of which renders their supply essentially automated and involving minimal human intervention, and impossible to ensure in the absence of information technology”.

This is not the reality of virtual congresses – live events – with speakers and attendees interacting with each other.

According to the rules of law, where there is no special rule, the general rule applies. Thus, participation in virtual events was taxed according to the general rules for services:



- For businesses (B2B), the place of supply is the place where the participant’s activity is established. In this case, there is no VAT amount on the registration invoice, as the reverse charge mechanism is applied. So, if the congress organiser sells a virtual participation to the Company X – which bought it for its employees – then the invoice is issued with zero VAT, under the reverse charge.
- For non-taxable people (B2C), the place of supply of services is the place where the supplier has established their activity. In this case, the organiser applies the VAT of their own country. Let’s say that the virtual participation is bought by a non-taxable individual who pays for the purchase themselves. The congress organiser issues an invoice with the VAT of their country of establishment. For instance, a French organiser applies the 20% French VAT.

How VAT applies to participation in hybrid events (events organised in person with participation also online)

1. How VAT is currently applied

New question: are the VAT rules for the physical admission applicable for the online attendance to an event organised in-person?

EU legislation does not seem to include online attendance.

When clarifying the notion of “supply of services and ancillary services related to the admission to events”, the EU Regulations no. 282/2011 describes them as: “supply of services of which the essential characteristics are the granting of the right of admission to an event” (such as shows, theatrical performances, matches, competitions, conferences, seminars, etc.) and “the ancillary services shall include in particular the use of cloakrooms or sanitary facilities”.

Nevertheless, in order to adapt to the new reality and provide some clear rules for congress organisers, some EU Member States (Finland, Italy, etc.) have decided that, in the case of hybrid events, the VAT rules applicable to face-to-face admission should also apply to online admission, which means that registrations for virtual

participation are subject to VAT in the country where the event is physically held.

The explanation given was that online participation does not imply the use of a different service provision from that offered to face-to-face participants, as each online participant also has the possibility of assisting and interacting with the speakers, just as if they were there.

If the congress is organised in Italy, all attendees – on-site and virtual – are invoiced with 22% Italian VAT.

2. The new legislation on virtual attendance

EU legislators made it clear that the VAT rules for the physical attendance shall not apply to the virtual attendance (*Council Directive 2022/542*). According to the amended Directive, the new place of supply for virtual events will always be the place where the customer is established, has their permanent address, or usual residence.

If an Italian virtual participant attends an event organised in Germany, the place of taxation is Italy, which means that the Italian individual (B2C) receives an invoice with 22% Italian VAT. If the client is an Italian business (B2B), the invoice is issued under the reverse charge mechanism. This mechanism allows the Italian company to pay and deduct the Italian VAT through its own VAT returns.

The main idea behind this new place of supply for virtual events is to guarantee taxation in the Member State of consumption of all services that can be supplied electronically. The definition of the concept of “electronically supplied services” will have to be revised to be broader. The new rules on the place of supply apply to virtual events, but also to all live-streamed activities.

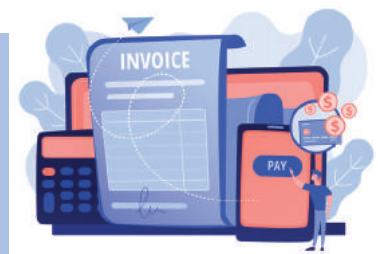
What information should be kept?

The new rules regarding the virtual attendance are set to be effective as from January 1, 2025. Member States must adopt the regulations and administrative provisions by December 31, 2024.

In the meantime, however, organisers of hybrid events should carefully look into the rules laid down by the tax authorities of the country where they are organising the event in order to avoid sanctions and financial losses.

ABOUT THE BC&A

Founded in 2004, BC&A is a VAT consultancy firm specialised in VAT management and recovery for association events. BC&A has been involved in hundreds of events, some with as many as 25,000 participants. Its expert guidance allows for several advantages: maximum recovery for the organiser and the participant; no local VAT registration required; and expedited reimbursement in Europe.





The Depth of **Event Experience** and Breadth of **Attendee Engagement**

Jamie Vaughan, Vice President, European Sales at Cvent, unpacks the difference between the depth of experience and breadth of engagement, how this relates to live and virtual event formats, and how planners can use this insight to determine the most strategic approach for their event programme.

The last few years have been a steep learning curve in the world of meetings and events. At the height of the pandemic, virtual events became the new normal and planners leaned into event technology and learnt how to create more effective online event programmes to engage attendees, and when the world started to open up again, hybrid events offered the best of both – events that combine live (in-person) and virtual experiences. As live events once again bounce back to the forefront, one of the challenges facing planners today is which formats (virtual, live or hybrid) are the right fit for their programme. By understanding the difference between the depth of experience and breadth of engagement – and how each format relates – planners can decide the most strategic approach.

Let's start with depth of experience – which comes through live events. When meeting in-person, we can create and maintain more meaningful connections from the significant time spent together. These connections exist between organiser and attendee, speaker and audience, venue and visitor, and of course, delegate and delegate. During face-to-face interactions, these connections grow, strengthen and inevitably become stronger and longer lasting. The result is that a live event will always facilitate deeper connections than a virtual one, and as such, live events will continue to be the core part of a more impactful event programme.

Now, on the flip side, breadth of engagement is linked to virtual events, where the focus is on engaging a larger online audience and expanding an event's reach given barriers to attend, like travel, are removed. Remember that with a well-constructed programme, whether virtual or live, audiences will join from far and wide to see and be a part of it. Virtual events can cross many more demographics than in-person events and enable the delivery of a far more varied programme – it is after all, far easier to offer 100 simultaneous streamed online sessions than it is to book 100 physical meeting rooms. The reason all events exist is to bring communities together, to educate, and to inspire, and virtual events offer an “always on” inclusive community engagement opportunity that should not be overlooked.

Creating an immersive virtual event experience comes with some challenges as attendees are often not on-camera. They also face more at home distractions. These factors should be taken into consideration and addressed during the event planning process. For example, creating shorter sessions with frequent breaks can help keep engagement and focus high. Also, working with the right event technology partners can help planners create valuable engagement-driven experiences such as organising attendees with similar interests into online breakout rooms, providing appointment scheduling tools so delegates can block off networking time, and live polling, Q&A and gamification elements within a mobile event app can further enhance the attendee experience and maximise engagement.

So, what's the best format for your event? If the content you want to share can be done effectively via video, there are only a few speakers, the agenda is short, and you want to reach people that cannot attend the event physically then virtual (breadth of engagement) is the ideal option. Events in which you want to offer a higher level of engagement, with networking and relationship building the primary objectives, a live event format (depth of experience) should be considered. However, here hybrid can work too as this event type can be effectively held both on-site and virtually and is ideal for those programmes in which you want to reach geographically dispersed audiences and develop meaningful relationships. Ultimately, how you blend virtual and live elements for your hybrid experience depends on the goals and objectives for each event.

The organisations making the best use of events are those that understand both the potential and the challenges of different event types. Planners should strive to achieve both depth of experience and breath of engagement across their event programmes. This approach provides greater event reach, fosters deeper connections, delivers learning at all levels, and succeeds in fulfilling a key planner and marketer objective: long-term, always on engagement.





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Kraków: attracts with energy, inspires with diversity

There is a place on the map of Europe that attracts a unique energy, where a thousand years of history have built the foundation for a multifaceted present and the tradition of meetings dates back to the 14th century. This is Kraków – an open and inspiring city that will provide an unforgettable experience for every visitor.

The spirit of Kraków is shaped by its history: the most ancient, dating back to the times of the kings of Poland, and the contemporary, from the 20th century. As early as the Middle Ages, trade flourished here and Poland's first university was founded, while some traditions have remained unchanged for centuries: the bugle call played from the tower for over 600 years, for example, or the traditional recipe for baking Kraków's obwarzanek (kind of pretzel). The Old Town and the former Jewish quarter of Kazimierz were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List 45 years ago. Significantly, unique historical locations such as historic palaces, original museum interiors or a medieval salt mine provide an original setting for business meetings.

On the other hand, the modern hotel infrastructure and venues such as TAURON Arena Kraków, the EXPO Kraków International Trade Fair and Congress Centre, the CKE_13 Fabryczna Conference Centre and the ICE Kraków Congress Centre can host events with thousands of participants. The latter boasts excellent recommendations: in 2017, it hosted the 41st session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, and in 2022, it became the host of the 61st ICCA Congress. Event organisers can count on the support of the city's Kraków Convention Bureau.

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