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OCTOBER 2020 #96 BUILDING BRIDGES IN THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY

Hangzhou's Top 10
Scenes of Digital Economy
Tourism

ALL DIGITAL:
"to not teach digital literacy
today is cruel "

Nothing is as Empowering as
Technology

Special Feature:
CORONA VS MICE
Destination Interviews
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Cover image: Alibaba's global headquarters in Hangzhou

**Innovation &
Technology**





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ALL DIGITAL:

"To not teach digital literacy to a child today is cruel"



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with Digital
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CONFERLI:
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Geneva Holds
Your **Health**
as a **Priority**



Digital Congresses: a Potential Win-Win

Writers, like painters and any other artists, experience periods of creative burn-out and a lack of inspiration. After spending several months thinking intensely about the future of travels and events, I am simply exhausted. What else have I to say about COVID-19? So many good things and so much nonsense have been written about this subject that I don't feel like adding much more. I started with philosophical musings, after which I switched to economic solutions, all to no avail.

All I could do was listen to the practical experience of professionals. I did find a few answers at AIPC's last annual conference, which was held both physically in Paris and virtually. As the international industry association for professional convention and exhibition centres, AIPC plays a crucial role in the future of these centres. The theme of the event - re-generation, examining the many ways in which our industry must re-imagine

the kinds of facilities and services that are offered today - really appealed to me. Plus, I saved €1,250 by attending the congress digitally.

What did I learn from this? Two things.

First: online, good speakers on a relevant subject are more compelling to listen than during a physical congress. An almost historic example of this premise was the presentation held by Isabel Bardinet of the European Society of Cardiology (ESC), definitely worth listening to again. And don't ever use the expression "virtual congress". Say "digital congress" instead, Bardinet reminded us.

Secondly: panel discussions make no sense on the digital level, especially when the participants are knocking on open doors and are tooting their own horn in a completely unnatural way. The panel discussion with the press

and the DMC's was a disaster. I wonder who took the time to listen to this clap-trap. I was instead pleasantly surprised by the speech of Aloysius Arlando, the president of AIPC and SingEx holdings Singapore. He showed attendees the friendly face of the AIPC.

Conclusion: I will definitely be attending more digital congresses in the future! They allowed me to save a lot of time and money, beside benefiting the environment. But... I am still dreaming of travelling to the vibrant congress city of Paris.

MARCEL A.M. VISSERS
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Hangzhou's Top 10 Scenes of Digital Economy Tourism

This year's Culture and Tourism Summit of Hangzhou & Meeting Industry Fair of the New Economic Destination took place in Hangzhou, China, from the 17th of September to the 18th - sponsored by Hangzhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Radio, TV and Tourism.

The top 10 scenes of Hangzhou digital economy tourism, announced in the opening ceremony of the summit, include: Alibaba Group (China) Co. Ltd. Hangzhou Hikvision Digital Technology Co. Ltd., the Cloud Town & Hangzhou City Brain Co. Ltd. Xiaoshan Hipark, Turing Town, Alibaba Cloud Industrial Internet Co., Ltd., Inno & Entre Town, Zhejiang Dahua Zhilian Co. Ltd., Xiaoshan Robot Town and Wasu Digital TV Media Group.

As one of the nation's best tourist cities and a famous national historical and cultural city, Hangzhou is the political, economic and cultural centre of Zhejiang province. From rich Chinese traditional culture to passionate team building programmes, to cooperation-inspiring business study trips, through a colourful night leisure life: event planners can feel what Hangzhou offers as an ideal MICE destination.

In recent years, the digital economy industry of Hangzhou has been constantly growing. The industrial sectors are empowered by technology innovations,

with emerging economic industries such as the Internet, cultural creativity, financial service, health care and new energy. In addition, top national and international conferences including the APSARA Conference, 2050 Conference, Netease Future Conference and Money20/20 take roots in Hangzhou. The fast-growing digital economy industry has attracted more and more Chinese and foreign business tourists, developing Hangzhou's tourism.

In order to integrate the new digital economy resources into the tourism concept, Hangzhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Radio, TV and Tourism launched the programme of the top 10 scenes of Hangzhou digital economy tourism. The 10 scenes have established a specified visitor reception mechanism mainly for business professionals, which will show its achievements in the development of the digital economy.

Alibaba is a world-renowned technology company founded in Hangzhou. It offers three visitor lines, covering the Visitor



Centre at its headquarter, QINCENGLI Mall, Tai Ji Zen Garden, FlyZoo Hotel and other unique resources. These spots are all representative. The Visitor Centre shows the style of the company, including its culture, industry and products. As a new retail experimental field in smart commercial space, QINCENGLI Mall relies on big data and AI technology to upgrade the production and circulation process of commodities and to form a display of new modes through a deep integration of online, offline and logistics. As the first smart hotel in the world, Fly Zoo Hotel boasts 290 rooms, a futuristic fitness centre and other facilities. Facial recognition check in, smart elevator, Tmall smart butler and robot food delivery are all part of the lure, reflecting the latest smart applications.

Hikvision is an intelligent IoT (Internet of Things) Solution and big data service provider, focusing on comprehensive security, smart business and a commitment to building a smart city. Covering an area of 4,500 square meters, the Hikvision Exhibition Centre showcases the design language centering on light. For example, a characteristic device in the hall is called "the light of heart mirror", whose linkage with the big screen and the dance of light helps convey the company's philosophy and the theme of the whole exhibition. It also shows a city empowered by high-tech, including full-width smart home experience,



▲ Alibaba Headquarter



▲ The Cloud Town

road safety driving guaranteed by vehicle-road collaborative technology, AR smart scenic sights, take-and-go easy shopping area, efficient smart factories and urban operation centre, etc.

As Hangzhou City Brain's home and the permanent venue of Cloud Computing Conference, the **Cloud Town** boasts intelligent manufacturing, space information and biological medicine, in its commitment to forge the first town in China's digital economy. Already Hangzhou's golden name card, the City Brain enables urban managers to better allocate public resources, make scientific decisions and improve governance efficiency. Hangzhou City Brain Co. Ltd., as the operation and management main body of the smart system, is striving to become a model in Hangzhou's digital economy tourism. This scene offers three routes covering Cloud Town Exhibition: Museum of Inspiration 2050, Herbal Garden and City Brain Base. In particular, the last one presents a mechanism for the government to explore the development and construction of the city brain and its industrial application,

as well as the process, achievements and future of collaborative innovation among enterprises and research institutions through the Innovation Base.

2020 Culture and Tourism Summit, with the topic of 'New Challenges, New Scenes and New Integrations', comprised multiple parts including parallel forums, an investment and financing wine party and a meeting industry fair. All in all, 100 CMOs of China's new economy enterprises, 20 PCOs from Beijing and Shanghai and 20 among PE and VC institutions participated as conference buyers. Within one and a half days, they had an in-depth business exchange with 120 MICE suppliers of Hangzhou.

Diversified empowerment, professional collaboration and authoritative investigation conducted between the new economic advantage industry and the conference industry are showing Hangzhou's unique strengths in industries, innovation and development potential as a destination of the new economy.



MICEHANGZHOU.COM



▼ 2020 Culture and tourism Summit

Nothing is as **Empowering** as **Technology**

A recent research by Maria Arlene T. Disimulacion, associate professor at Manila’s Far Eastern University, analysed the future directions of MICE tourism during and after COVID-19.

“MICE generates foreign exchange, increases trade and investments, provides employment, boosts local economies, and promotes destinations. The major key to its success is the strong collaboration with the travel, hospitality, and leisure sectors that provide products and services for the



IAPCO’s survey on the impacts of COVID-19 shows that almost the totality of members (95%) have been offering virtual meetings to replace physical ones.

Also, 57% of them advised that up to 25% of their congresses or meetings remain virtual or hybrid for this year.

According to 38% of respondents, hybrid meetings will increase at least by 25% of current levels next year, while physical meetings will decrease by 10-25%.

industry,” she wrote.

“Therefore, any disruption along its value chain may lead to significant losses for its stakeholders: organizers, participants, suppliers, sponsors, and host destinations. Although the industry is resilient, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) may be the definitive crisis that will reset any previous gains from a formerly robust tourism industry.”

For instance, the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) changed completely during the pandemic.

Despite the disruption brought about by COVID-19, the paper argues that stakeholders can gain from the use of ICT when

the technology is matched with objectives of sustainability, engagement and collaboration. “To remain relevant in the dynamic, interconnected, fragmented MICE environment, stakeholders must revisit the guidelines issued in response to the pandemic [...] This may refer to an optimal combination of face-to-face and virtual techniques for competitive advantage that may result in improved revenues and profits.”

Disimulacion believes that new conceptual frameworks, innovative formats and replicable business models may help stakeholders navigate MICE post COVID-19. She is not the only one.

IAPCO member Barbara Calderwood wrote: “Fully virtual congresses may be the engagement technique that associations must embrace right now for their business resilience, but hybrid will surely be the blended congress solution of choice for their robust recovery and growth beyond the immediate impact of COVID-19.”

“Never has there been a more important moment in time for PCOs to demonstrate to associations the full force of their value proposition. We are key in supporting associations with the redesign of their congresses to fit the digital space and in driving engagement with their customers for effective business resilience and growth.”

A new article in the *Singapore Business Review* says hybrid events are arising in the current post-pandemic era.

For instance, Sino Elite MICE Services is working on technologies for cloud conferences and digital conference solutions. Their clients would previously invite 300 to 600 people and now more than 1,000. “Since the outbreak, we found that previously developed technologies no longer meet the needs of clients,” chairman and CEO Martin Zhao told *Singapore Business Review*.

Other digital innovations include: virtual scanning for hotels, e-banking for restaurants, AI in venues and smart identification in airports.

To take a step ahead, let’s try to imagine: facial recognition technologies that could read facial expressions in conference rooms and give organisers a better understanding of how their attendees are feeling, real-time translation services through apps, data powered by AI used to match them with like-minded individuals.

Of course, changes won’t come without challenges. One example is data integration and tool fragmentation. “I see bigger events



invest a lot of budget into custom design and attempts to extend and increase the attendee experience,” Steen Tromholt, CEO of Conferize, told *The Meeting Magazine*. “Usually things look good, but the digital design extending the event experience is usually lacking. The reason is: It’s hard.”

But we all look for immersive experiences. As Daniel Newman wrote already four years ago in *Forbes*, “We live in an age where people want to experience everything. We want to get the most out of life. We want to be immersed in the story, feel like we’re ‘living’

the story, not just reading it. By making your community the main character, and having a keen understanding of what your customers want, you will be able to include them in the story, in the experience, you are trying to tell and sell.”

It may seem like a futuristic scenario, and it is exactly what will reward destinations that are better prepared.

Event also made it clear: “It pays to think like a futurist when tech is involved. Innovations like facial recognition pave the way for better experiences, and this includes MICE events.

Not only does it make them more engaging, but it also simplifies the event organisation process and gives both the hotel and event planner a better way to collaborate. Meeting planners and attendees expect the same level of technology in their event experiences.”

A joint evolution between buyers and suppliers will be born. In the future, any association will favor a destination that is better prepared technologically, as the destination itself can select the savviest association to host in its space. We are here to see what will happen next.





“We are driven by our **passion**, our **curiosity** and our **ingenuity**”

Conferli has recently announced the launch of its innovative platform, a solution that streamlines the process of matching association events with destinations and venues. *HQ* interviewed the CEO and founder Nienke van der Malen.

Can you tell us how Conferli was born?

During my career in the MICE industry, from venue sales to destination marketing, I have found that there is a huge lack of independent benchmarking options for cities and venues in our market. There are so many different parameters that matter when a conference organiser chooses a destination. We decided to build the solution to the problem we have been dealing with for years, so that we can help hundreds of associations, destinations and venues across the world.

Conferli was officially piloted on the 3rd of June, featuring all of its core functions: from matchmaking, to benchmarking and RFP management. This launch was preceded with an intense period of business and technical development. Our team of experienced professionals in the field of destination marketing, convention bureaus, conference organisation, MICE, hospitality and digital technology joined forces. As a team, we are driven by our passion for this market, our curiosity and

our ingenuity to come up with new solutions. We let go of old structures and give the power to our users. We are a very dynamic and curious company: we continuously question current practices and work hard to let go of old structures. We want to give power to our platform's users - in enabling guided research and informed decision-making.

Who are your clients?

Conferli is the world's first match-making platform for association events that helps associations, destinations and venues find each other directly. The platform revolutionises the way associations structure their tender process, by introducing a data-driven city-matching tool.

We are currently operating in Europe, featuring 275 destinations. Our clients are cities, associations and event venues. We focus on the smaller associations events up to 400 people.

What do people need when in the process of organising an event?

As content is getting more and more important, a link to a destination is often very valuable for associations. Until we launched Conferli, there had been no global service that provided associations with information about destinations. Nowadays, it's not just the number of hotel rooms you are offering. Times change and in modern times organisers are looking for a number of metrics when deciding where their next event will be held. They need stronger content, knowledge hubs, more delegates, marketing support and so on. Cities evolve and invest in certain sectors or knowledge hubs, differentiating themselves from their competitors.

Associations, venues and destinations need each other to organise conferences, but they have no way of finding each other easily. Smaller associations do not have resources to conduct a thorough research into destinations and venues that meet all their needs. On the other hand, destinations and venues don't have easy access to the market of smaller association events, which would help with

across borders.

In a traditional sector like the associations' one, it will be a challenge to convince them to virtually find their new destination without seeing it first. It will impact the associations, but also the way destinations and venues are doing sales.

How has your business changed through time, especially in the last eight months?

Of course, our launch during COVID-19 was rather controversial. We were hesitant about continuing with our launch, but soon we realised that our platform can play an important role in the recovery of our industry. We offer virtual matchmaking and, in times where it is impossible to meet, it appears to be a great solution. We needed to adapt our business model and, because we just started, we were flexible to do so. We temporarily lifted our membership fees, we set up an integration with the "World Travel and Tourism Council" to mark destinations with a safe travel stamp. Through these kinds of actions, we can unite our industry during these difficult times and enable all participants to find each other and make plans for the future.

Do you believe new technologies are surrounded by a lot of hype, or is there a real potential for future development?

We truly believe in new technologies. By using techniques like AI, it can save time and money during the process and will make the end result much better. Technology can help to broaden your horizon, gives inspiration and stimulates you to look beyond your normal pool of experience.

What do you predict next year will look like for the industry?

Without a doubt we have been hit hard and the crisis is not over yet. But we foresee that there will be a slight recovery in 2021. Meetings might get smaller and more regional but virtual will never take over face-to-face. We showed as an industry how flexible and creative we are. This experience will help us to come out of this stronger and better than before. Conferli is ready for that.



Nienke van der Malen

CEO and Founder of Conferli

long-term booking. Conferli solves both of the problems with its match-making and benchmarking tools.

What challenges do you face?

Launching a new platform during a crisis was our biggest challenge. Being a new 'kid in town' is challenging, especially now, when everyone is on a tight budget and is uncertain about the future.

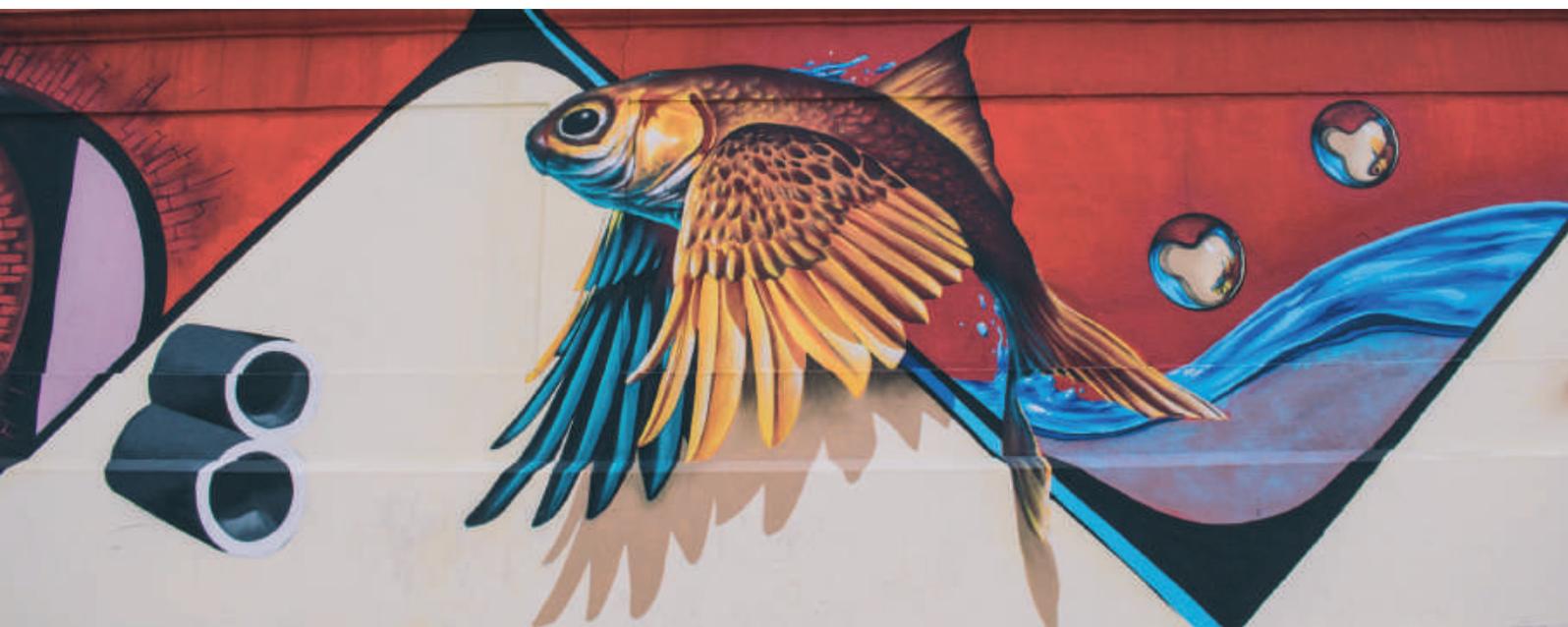
Then, we had to adapt to the everyday changing needs of our three target groups (associations, destinations and venues) especially in times like these. For the long term, focus on safety and security (1,5 meters away) and changing of hygienic measures will impact the industry. Furthermore, for the delegate there is uncertainty about travelling



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What's Wrong with Digital Events?

In theory, nothing. In practical terms, digital events need a completely different kind of engagement from both organizers and attendees. They also involve different industries, as transportation and catering are not necessary but a good online platform really is. Finally, digital may mean less jobs.

The coronavirus recession will last for a while, arguably longer than initially expected, with high unemployment numbers. “The business meetings and events sector has been completely knocked off its feet and decimated by the impacts of COVID-19,” stated the Meetings Industry Association, which estimated 126,000 total job losses in UK

only. Over a third of venues (34%) are reporting values between €1 million and €5.6 million for lost business as a result of COVID-19, with the average venue reporting this figure at €2.7 million. And the impact has gone much further than just the venues. Almost half (47%) have had to reduce or request more flexible terms with their suppliers, while 7% have to source new ones because their regular pre-COVID-19 suppliers are no longer in operation.

For once, digitalisation can't be blamed and, if anything, it is the answer to the industry's problems. Given people's indestructible need to meet, a new era of digital and hybrid events will soon kick off.

This will help professionals resurrect from the dust. It shouldn't come as a surprise that Zoom's revenue quadrupled in the second quarter of 2020, with \$663.5 million in revenue compared to \$145.8 million a year ago.

In this edition, we explored the virtues, the mighty effects and the challenges of technology, we presented a platform called Conferli, an review several destinations such as London, Bogotá, Berlin, Dubai, Geneva and other European cities.

HQ's special report from the MICE industry perspective continues after a very strange summer.



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Wir Sind **Berlin**

Multikulti, ecstatic and overwhelming, Berlin was one of the most requested destinations for events of all kinds last year and has not rested on its laurels since then. Here's what the convention office of visit.berlin did to secure its reputation.

▲ Roof construction of the Sony Center at Potsdam Square
© visitBerlin, Photo: Philip Koschel

The German capital gained a fantastic third place in the latest ICCA ranking for international meetings destinations. As a creative and vibrant metropolis at the heart of Europe, the reasons are plain sight and combine with great equipment and venues.

Over 150,000 hotel beds at an average cost of €100 per night, in addition to more than 360 exhibition spaces with direct transport from over 188 destinations, are all impressive figures. However, like many other destinations, the city suffered an inevitable decline due to the serious crisis we are experiencing.

“Indeed, 2019 was possibly Berlin’s best year for meetings, conventions and incentives, however COVID-19 has changed the game here. We look ahead to embrace that change,” **Marco Oelschlegel**, conventions director of visit.berlin, tells us. Germany’s international reputation during the pandemic also contributed to maintaining this image of relentless efficiency. The Berlin Senate, for example, approved a new congress fund that will help the city attract

new events in the coming months. “We have consequently developed a dedicated hygiene and safety framework which serves meeting planners as a guideline. Our goal is to convince as many attendees as possible that it is safe to come to meetings here,” Oelschlegel adds. Local authorities decided to soften the regulations for meetings, conventions, events and trade fair shows, progressively for indoor and open air events, reducing the anxiety of meeting planners and the ponderosity of virtual events.

“We have supported the German Convention Bureau’s Future Meeting Space project, as well as jointly organising ‘bocom.online’ on the 3rd of September, a conference that discusses new conference formats, since we believe the meetings industry will keep the hybrid option,” Oelschlegel says. A great tool for this purpose is the virtual and exclusive event format ‘made in Berlin’, a platform that favours the presentation of news and insight tips with partners.

But how long can Berlin sustain this working

frame? Are we ready to move forward? Marco Oelschlegel is cautious: “We will continue to live with the virus within the next months and I think all of us got accustomed to new habits and behaviors. Meetings have been possible under these conditions in Berlin since June and people need and want to meet too. If there is a second wave, we will be much better prepared than in the spring.” Proof of this are the constant openings this autumn, with cultural shows, art exhibitions, festivals and restaurants.

Finally, the city’s commitment to environmental sustainability has been a strong pull factor. ‘Sustainable Meetings Berlin’ was launched at IMEX in 2019, as an initiative with all the partners to make the city one of the most innovative and sustainable meeting destinations in the world. “COVID-19 has even been an accelerator for us in this way: the meeting of the future will be hybrid, flexible and sustainable in all its dimensions,” Oelschlegel concludes.

Bogotá: the Rising Latino Star

COVID-19 has only arrived in South America at a later stage, but its effects were felt seriously. Now, Bogota is getting ready for its reopening and for welcoming again thousands of international visitors.

Latin American countries are facing an unprecedented health crisis that is dragging back their economies. Now that the curve is flattening, Colombia sets to reopen much of the key services and to lift a big part of the emergency measures, which will represent a major recovery step for meetings and events.

The Greater Bogota Convention Bureau (GBCB) has never stopped, instead they implemented a number of campaigns, such as #SeeYouinBogota, aimed to target high-impact events and to cater new clients and affiliates.

These are decisive actions to preserve the status of a BestCities Global Alliance's pristine member that moved up one spot in the 2019 ICCA rankings, positioning itself in the top five meeting cities in Latin America.

"We have identified 200 opportunities for our city and presented 27 bids for events to be hosted from 2021 to 2027," says GBCB's executive director **Liliana Orbezo**. As for measurable goals until the end of 2020, the GBCB's target is to bring 16 events for the city, in a year that they believe is "to sow for later harvesting". The El Dorado International Airport is planning to restart international commercial flights soon, meanwhile it is open for domestic flights.

The city is currently working on another campaign named #ChangeTheDateNotTheDestination. "The purpose of the campaign is to retain these events in Bogota, highlighting their importance in the city's reactivation,

its economic and social development," Orbezo adds.

To achieve this, various service sectors related to the MICE industry tested their biosafety protocols and the bureau is pushing forward the COVID-19 Biosafety Check-In Certification Seal, while closely watching the global situation to adopt best practices in case of a second wave. "All the safety measures will ensure that this kind of events could be hosted with large crowds in a controlled way," Orbezo says. "Historically, tourism has proven to be a key driver of international recovery, given that it triggers economic and social development for destinations."

At Zona MICE, one of the most important trade fairs in the region with focus on business rounds between buyers and suppliers, virtual events were also discussed and conclusions did not differ from the dominant opinion: technology is a great solution for the time being but face-to-face will never disappear. "Human interaction is essential for developing industries and for GDP growth," Orbezo says. "Events where people meet are the ideal way for transferring know-how, doing business, bringing investments and learning new things."

Both Colombia and its capital have taken important steps towards responsible tourism by advancing in terms of sustainability. The country joined the Future of Tourism Coalition to promote post-pandemic travel, while Bogotá created the Synergies for Change initiative which allows each event to contribute to the sustainable development goals.



Liliana Orbezo

Executive Director - Greater Bogota Convention Bureau





Accelerating Transformations in Dubai

Beyond the skyscrapers filling the horizon, Dubai is ahead of its time when it comes to the MICE upturn. Beacon of the Middle East in many professional areas, the convention department explained how it intends to get around the crisis.

Emerging over the dunes of the Arabian Gulf, lies a bustling market that competes in world rankings as a business hub. Events are no exception, with the Emirate's market going alongside tourist attractions such as Burj Khalifa, Palm Jumeirah and Gold Souk.

As a stopover point between the West and the East, Dubai is working on a plan to revitalise the tourism sector in the post COVID-19 phase. That's what **Steen Jakobsen**, assistant vice-president of **Dubai Business Events**, tells us: "Since the onset of the pandemic, we have maintained our high levels of engagement with meeting planners and executives around the world". The objectives are clear and do not differ much from the general trend of postponing events to 2021, rather than cancelling them altogether. "Our main goal is to provide a platform for associations to resume their business events safely, including in cases where their original host city may no longer be feasible," he adds. In the meantime, life is being made up of

webinars. "Our offices in China were the first to pivot a 100% digital operation, with webinars and virtual conferencing quickly rolled out to ensure we could continue to engage with planners." As the pandemic spread globally, they implemented similar changes across other key markets, with more than 125 virtual meetings and interacting with approximately 10,000 buyers. COVID-19 is accelerating transformations that were already underway, like remote working, and innovations that were already having an impact, like digitalisation. "We are bound to see associations look to maximise their reach by leveraging technology. A wealth of expertise in this area means that the city is ideally placed to empower associations to deliver on hybrid events."

Working with stakeholders across the city, Dubai's Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, has put in place some guidelines to enable the resumption of face-to-face meetings. With a firm focus on the safety of all parties involved, this framework will facilitate business events

adapted to the new challenges and will be significant for the whole events industry, including airports, hotels and venues. And how are they going to bid then? "As a result of the extended lead times often involved with major congresses, it is not so much the health risks that are concerning, but rather the impact they are having on bidding cycles," Jakobsen explains.

In the longer term, the COVID-19 experience is likely to vault health and safety further up the list of priorities for associations and Dubai plans to demonstrate strength in this area. "There are new dynamics at play and potential proof points and solutions that we can add to our proposition."

The factors that have increasingly made Dubai an attractive host destination for associations and events continue to resonate: the city offers expertise across key sectors and industries, and keeps innovation at the heart of its economic growth.

London is Calling

London is unrivalled with its mix of historic venues, new hotels and urban developments. Now, the city is reinventing itself once again to be the perfect fit for your next congress. **London & Partners** exchanged a few words with *HQ* about the pandemic and the paths they have taken.

To say that London is the right city to host your next conference is an understatement. For the fifth consecutive year, the city retained the number one ranking as the most popular destination for business events, according to the 'Cvent Supplier Network'. The UK capital powers a huge network of flight connections that attracts delegates to unique spaces and top notch industry clusters, right into a cross-cultural and global environment. Benefitting from its status as a global tech hub and financial mastodon, London offers tradition and expertise for a wide range of sectors.

However, MIA estimates that there have been 126,000 job losses in the UK, with catering, front-of-house and event managers being the most severely affected by COVID-19. Something that **Suzanne Singleton**, head of associations at London & Partners, comments: "In March, we saw a tidal wave of live events cancelled, travel scaled down and our hotels and venues closed their doors." The London Convention Bureau team played an important role in supporting planners and venue partners in the following months,

whilst its management team set about working on broader strategic plans with industry associations.

"We responded practically by enhancing our online resources as we adapted our content to offer virtual site visits and up-to-date listings of the 360-degree virtual tours available in London," says Singleton. This trend was highlighted during London Tech Week, the most influential technology festival in Europe, that delved into the impact of tech ecosystems on key issues such as health, security and the future of work. Digital platforms are providing solutions to deliver essential content and data and, according to Singleton, "there is a real need for creativity and innovation for these events to be a success".

"As Europe's biggest tech hub, we are seeing an exciting wave of event formats evolving, provided by London's innovative companies working with our unique venue solutions," she adds.

On the other hand, the 'Because I'm a Londoner' campaign encouraged a sustainable recovery in consumer spending, while Visit Britain's kite

-mark, 'We're Good to Go', has been devised to give assurance and confidence to event planners. A series of pilot test events with the central government and public health of England is underway to help further refine logistics, health and hygiene and track and trace systems.

"This will enable us to open up for large events as soon as its safe to do so," Singleton says. "There has been a monumental push across associations, venues and suppliers who have been working incredibly hard to create safe environments."

In addition, London's ambitions to lead the way globally in sustainability will continue to attract more events in the future with the ambition for a zero-carbon capital by 2030. "The last few months have shown the importance for London to become a cleaner, greener city and this is likely to become the new backdrop for future delegations coming to London," Singleton concludes. London has always shown remarkable resilience in face of external challenges and this legacy will help the city stand up to COVID-19 and the next stage of Brexit.



16

Events, Technology and Sustainability: is There a Future?

The makeup of the industry and the format of tomorrow's event remain unknown for many destinations in Europe. While there's consensus around a webinar never fully replacing a physical event, the truth is that technology has brought new arguments that conventions bureaus cannot ignore. We continue our round of interviews across Europe with three new guests and asked them:

1. After months of restrictions and a MICE breakdown, how did activities resume at your destination? What future initiatives are you planning to leverage new business?
2. As physical events had to give way to new virtual tools and hybrid meetings, how is your destination preparing to implement innovative technologies?
3. Between sustainability, safety standards and your own bureau's annual goals, what lessons have you learned in order to design the congress of the future?



BRUGES CONVENTION BUREAU

BY THE SALES MANAGER, JASMINE KESTENS.

1 When great parts of Belgium recently turned orange we had to pause our newly launched 'Imagine Bruges' marketing campaign and take a step back. Nevertheless, as a destination we want to keep alive, inspire our communities, and above all create some sense of perspective to the future. By continuing our 'Imagine Bruges' in a soft version and being primarily online, we want to keep track of what's going on and listen to the needs of our suppliers and local stakeholders. Furthermore, we are looking forward to the opening of our brand new and state-of-the-art Bruges Meeting & Convention Centre, in January 2022. The greatest part of our MICE business is focused on international tourism. For obvious reasons this active promotion is on hold and has switched to focus on KPI's of our city. The corporate business has become more important these days as we focus on attracting local and Belgian based companies to organise their meetings here.

2 While the main goals of bringing people together and exchanging knowledge haven't changed, the 'how-to' has changed. Virtual meetings may be here to stay, but we believe face-to-face conferences still offer value, especially when destinations are willing to grow with their clients. Together with "Visit Flanders", we have created tools like the

'Covid Event Risk Model' to help planners organise events in the safest way possible. The model has already strummed up a lot of interest on an international level. By attending virtual workshops and online courses, we are learning a lot of opportunities that we can share with our local stakeholders to create best practice cases. Also within the construction of the new Convention Centre, there will be great attention to the possibility of organising virtual and hybrid meetings.

3 The MICE industry has always been and will always be sensitive for changes and be impacted on a global scale. Flexibility and sailing the waves of change is key in our business, but will be even more important in the future. I am absolutely convinced that in order to win this battle we will have to be able to listen and apply pro-actively to the needs of congresses and its attendees in the future. Quality above quantity, service, creativity, flexibility and innovation are keys within our daily operation to deliver every congress as a great success.

We try to make a difference by working tailor-made, delivering a high standard service, working free of charge and, above all, on a human scale.



VISITBRUGESCONVENTIONBUREAU.BE

SALZBURG CONVENTION BUREAU

BY THE SALES AND MARKETING MANAGER AND DEPUTY DIRECTOR,
ELISABETH KASSANITS-PFOESS.

1 We, as a Convention and Visitors Bureau, never stopped working. Of course, some international conferences were postponed or even cancelled. In the past two months after the lockdown, we could already welcome several clients for site visits and speak about scientific conferences for 2025 and onwards. Furthermore, we also received the very positive note of winning the 'International Data Week 2023', which will be the first European edition ever. We constantly try to stay in contact with our clients and friends as we are including web calls, smaller client events and simple phone calls to exchange the current state of their associations. In addition, we are very proud to be part of the 'EU CVB Network', which represents 7 CVBs which market their destinations to associations. Salzburg had also the honor to host our hundredth edition of the Salzburg Festival, which was only possible

due to a very detailed security concept.

2 Most of our venues were already installing AV technology to stream conferences before COVID-19, but we had several conferences that were able to change their live event to a virtual edition within a short period, by the support of local providers. Furthermore, the destination also provides audiovisual material to present itself in a virtual way. We also organised some webinars in a very early stage to get people out of their daily home office routine and take them into a virtual journey.

3 Listening to client's needs was and still is the most important fact. Flexibility and sharing good practices from other events is another.



SALZBURGCB.COM

VALENCIA CONVENTION BUREAU

BY THE HEAD OF THE BUREAU, MANUEL FERRÍS.

1 The MICE industry is an umbrella industry for many sectors in the economy: education, finance, agriculture, medicine, travel, etc. Thus, the business reopened step by step, taking all the precautions needed, making good use of the latest technology available to host online meetings and starting from regional to national events. We will be able to move into international events soon enough when the situation is more appropriate. At this moment, we are working for the period of 2021 to 2028 on 90 bids for both corporate and association meetings and we have already 38 congresses confirmed for 2021. Finally, our idea is to continue with virtual activities that have proven to be effective and also resume those face-to-face activities available until the end of the year.

2 Implementing innovative technologies has been always on our agenda, from a singular space to a larger scale. In fact, we are in the final stages of bidding to become the European Capital of Innovation in 2020. The Valencia Conference Centre invested over a million euros to offer connectivity for over 3000 devices as well as

state-of-the-art equipment which allow organisers to personalise every detail, deliver ultimate performance and also improve energy efficiency. Furthermore, Valencia has projects like 'GoHub' which is an open innovation hub in water tech, industry 4.0 and smart cities or even the 'VLC Tech City' which is a public-private, inclusive and open initiative that connects the entire technological ecosystem of the city to generate employment and growth.

3 We know that safety measures are here to stay for a long period of time and we understand that sustainability is not a trend but a must. Valencia is the first city in the world to verify and certify the carbon footprint of its activity. We recognise also that technology is a constant in our society that helped us during these tough times and will continue to do so in the future. Finally, we believe that nothing can replace the essence of real-life events.



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Geneva Holds **Your Health as a Priority**



With more than 100 venues and hotels registered as safe spaces, special sanitary measures implemented and - last but not least - a traditional *savoir faire* in hosting international events, Geneva is fully ready for organising your next event.

Living up to the reputation of a city that offers top expertise and services for international association events, Geneva implemented a strict **safety protocol** to ensure the best sanitary conditions for your event's participants and delegates. In this way, the city will also be able to host events for **over 300 people**.

Everything in place to welcome you in the best conditions during these exceptional months

The **Clean & Safe** label, supported by Switzerland Tourism, ensures that Geneva venues, hotels and service providers are taking all necessary measures to protect guests, from social distancing to implemented hygiene rules. Protocols are based on **rules for hygiene and behaviour**, as well as **protection guidelines** for employees. Business events organisers, accommodation, catering, public transport... all city's professionals are putting everything in place to cope with the sanitary situation and **protect** their guests.

Experts at hosting events

Major international event organisers rely on Geneva's expertise and know-how every day. Known as the **capital of peace**, Geneva offers top-quality **congress infrastructures**, a high level of expertise in several domains and a powerful network. To guarantee your congress' **success**, new solutions for meetings have been developed, from live to **virtual and hybrid events**.

Since the beginning of October, events for **more than 300 people** can be organised with a **tailormade protection plan**.

They trust Geneva

These are the reasons why the city was able to host **Joint Meeting 2020 SSI-SSHH** during three days last September. For the first time, the two Swiss societies (Swiss Infectious Disease Society, or SSI, and Swiss Hospital Hygiene Society, or SSHH) organised a joint annual meeting, which gathered 270 participants and

80 exhibitors in Palexpo, the second largest congress centre in Switzerland. At the end of the event - entirely live with plenary sessions, parallel sessions and an exhibition area - organisers and attendees considered all conditions fulfilled and the **face-to-face** exchange particularly valuable.

As part of its next steps, Geneva will host the **1st International Association Forum (GIAF)**, which will take place at the InterContinental Hotel Geneva in November. GIAF's mission is bringing together Europeans, international associations and non-profit organisations. After a careful discussion to make sure that participants will **attend the meeting safely**, organisers chose a hybrid meeting solution with **interactive** workshops, conferences, roundtables and knowledge-sharing opportunities.

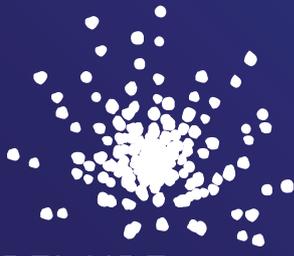


▲ Joint Meeting 2020 SSI-SSHH

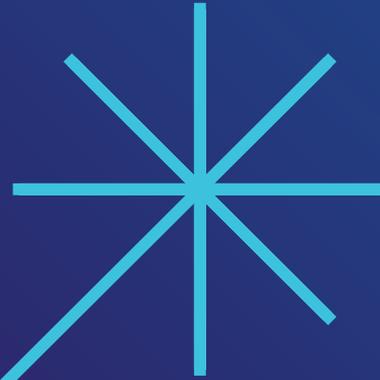


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Adelaide, Australia's Convention Centre
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“Virtual events have the potential to reach an unprecedented audience”

A group of association and congress experts, **Congrex Switzerland** organises and manages conferences all over the world with multifunctional services for events of all sizes and shapes. Since the beginning of March, they have formed a team of 12 specialists in virtual exhibitions anticipating the ongoing trend that foreshadows an increase in hybrid meetings. *HQ* interviewed **Silvano Schär**, Congrex Switzerland’s head of sales and marketing.



The shift brought by COVID-19 has also tested congresses’ formats and concepts. How has your way of organising a congress changed after the pandemic?

With the restrictions on international travel and large gatherings, virtual and hybrid meetings have become the new standard, so we have put a lot of effort into re-designing the conference experience. A new approach was needed, taking into account both the limitations and advantages of virtual events, while striving to offer the same value to everyone involved. Online participants expect to engage with exhibitors and fellow conference attendees as they would at a real-world conference. If they are not able to do this, we risk losing them. Therefore, the programme needs to be built with elegant presentations that hold the attention and engage viewers. There is currently no shortage of technical solutions available to host a successful virtual congress, but the challenge was to identify which ones are the best for our participants, exhibitors, sponsors and faculty. It is not enough to have everything look professional - we must also offer a compelling online experience, which is user-friendly and works in parts of the world where internet quality isn’t the best.

As a PCO of great reputation with an excellent customer base, do you feel you were thrown into this virtual world too soon? Or have you already been carrying this technological transition for a while?

Hybrid and virtual meetings are actually not a new thing, but before the coronavirus pandemic the interest in these kinds of events was relatively low. The events of 2020 and the disruption in the business events industry have forced us to accelerate what was already a slowly growing trend. I do not believe that this is the end of live events. I believe that there are many who feel that virtual meetings can never provide the same emotional experience as a conference in a real-world location. Nevertheless, virtual and hybrid events have the potential to reach an audience we were not able to reach before. Virtual exhibitions were a new development for us. In early March of 2020, we started training 12 people in our staff to use virtual exhibition software, which can be used to create online exhibitions and congresses. This involved a period of very intensive study for our team, learning to use the new software at very short notice. Our people are highly motivated and these new systems are now up and running.

Congrex also maintains strong professional ties with associations, providing administration and membership services within your framework of expertise. As far as you are aware, what is the state of play of associations in these adverse times?

The current situation has caused and will continue to cause a lot of uncertainty and it has of course been a very difficult time for all concerned. For most associations, organising their annual meeting is not the only reason they exist. They are engaged in lots of other activities that need to be financed. Some associations depend completely on the revenue of their annual congress to finance their activities throughout the year. This means that the current situation may threaten their very existence. From the associations I deal with, I have seen a great interest in virtual solutions, which can offer so many new possibilities, providing education and knowledge sharing during the whole year, as well as potentially creating new revenue streams. Associations are currently very open to try new ideas and new ways of providing for the needs of their members.

In terms of corporate responsibility, do you consider that the praxis around sustainability, green innovation and environment-friendly management will become a definitive rule in the advent of this crisis?

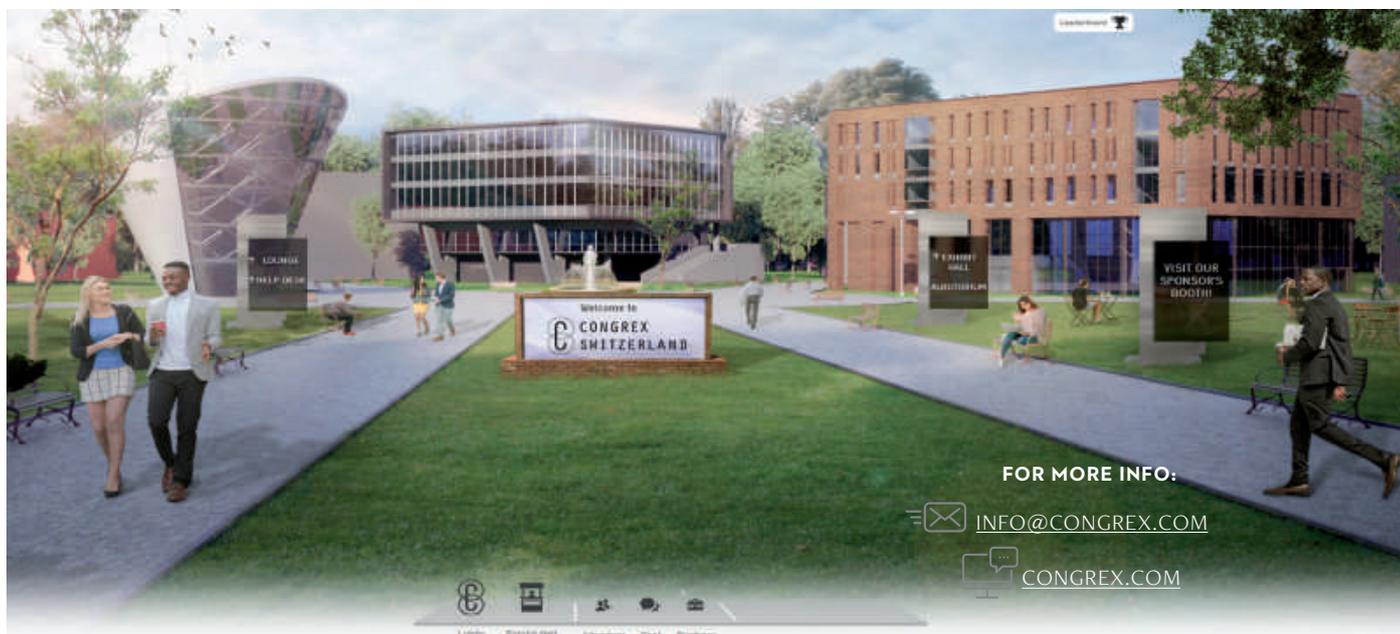
I hope so. I think it depends on whether travel behaviour has permanently changed or if things will eventually return to the way they were before. The coronavirus pandemic has shown us that we can successfully organise and participate in online meetings, and I believe that for some meetings this will be the preferred format for the near future. Given the success of the virtual meetings, it becomes harder to justify flying half way around the globe to deliver a 20 minute presentation, when we can connect with a worldwide audience from our own home or office.

With the great policies of our time mixed with the futuristic evidence of the hybrid event or the AI meeting, at what stage are destinations in this unbridled race for technology and sustainability? Are we prepared for what is coming?

If you look at all the webinars that have taken place in the last couple of months on this topic, I believe it is proof that destinations and venues have a great interest in what changes the future will bring. I believe we all need to work together, talk together and develop new concepts for the future together - including associations, venues, destinations and PCOs. Some destinations reacted swiftly and organised excellent webinars, where best practices and the needs of the different participants were discussed. Everyone will have to keep an open mind regarding the future and some will be forced to leave their comfort zone.

Congrex recently published a white paper on the challenges and opportunities for a 21st century association. How can you summarise these different points of discussion?

The coronavirus pandemic has severely disrupted the events industry and forced many associations to either cancel, relocate, postpone or adapt their conference into a virtual or hybrid meeting. Our white paper explains how to handle these extraordinary situations, what needs to be focused on and what you need to keep in mind. In addition, it contains an explanation of the different types of online events, because all of them require a particular strategy to guarantee optimal delivery and engagement. Finally, new risks need to be considered and new questions need to be answered. A hybrid event means to have a backup strategy, if things don't go entirely to plan.





Renato Sabbadini
CEO of ALL DIGITAL

“To not teach **digital literacy** to a child today is **cruel**”

Brussels-based and previously known as Telecentre Europe, **ALL DIGITAL** is a leading pan-European association representing 70 non-profit organisations in the digital and education fields. Its mission meets *HQ's* cover theme, so we asked CEO **Renato Sabbadini** why we should not shy away from the ongoing transformation.

How has your association managed to overcome all the trials and tribulations created by COVID-19? How is ALL DIGITAL holding up to the crisis?

Because of the very nature of the issue we deal with as ALL DIGITAL (digital competences), our organisation and especially our membership throughout all Europe were placed much better than others, in terms of dealing with the immediate necessity of transferring online most of the work done offline. In some cases, our members contributed directly with emergency training of many teachers, so that lessons in schools could continue online during the lockdown. In other cases, unfortunately, face-to-face training for people with very low digital skills had to be postponed until the end of the lockdown.

ALL DIGITAL regularly promotes workshops and learning courses for people of all ages, special needs and social backgrounds. Where do we stand as a society, in terms of digital transition?

The picture varies a lot depending on which countries you consider in the European Union. If you look at the ‘Digital Economy and Society Index’ produced by the European Commission, every year on the basis of data collected by Eurostat, you can see that for the whole of the EU, 42% of the population does not have sufficient digital skills, which means, for instance, that they know how to

send emails but not upload content created by themselves on the internet. Or they can look for health related information on the internet, but are unable to transfer a file, etc. That 42% at the EU level, however, goes down to 21% in the Netherlands and rises to 71% in Bulgaria, so there is still quite a lot of work to do before all Europeans are equally digitally literate.

ALL DIGITAL states in its manifesto that “the development of digital competences must be sustainable, context-aware, open, persisting, evolving, adaptable and communicative”. Do your goals include building a digital society in line with environmental sustainability?

Digital competences are, in essence, the third form of literacy, together with literacy and numeracy, that no human being alive can really afford not to have. To not teach digital literacy to a child today is as cruel and inconceivable as not teaching them literacy and numeracy. True inclusivity is at the core of the work of digital competence centres. As far as environmental sustainability is concerned, the lockdown has shown us how many jobs can continue to take place also without the need for people to gather daily in an office, thanks to digital competences, and an infrastructure up to the task, of course; you cannot work from home if the connection is always bad. Small and large companies all over the world are seriously reconsidering their logistics in terms

of offices. Also in light of the fact that a significant reduction or even elimination of commute times is beneficial not only to the environment, but to the productivity and wellbeing of the workforce.

What will be ALL Digital's priorities for the last quarter of the year with regard to innovation and technology?

Our priorities will depend on drawing the right lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on the economy. The role of digital competences has become more evident than ever and it is crucial to keep an eye on innovations that might make the delivery of the digital competences training easier. Particularly to those who will need them the most, having lost their jobs. Needless to say, the institutions, the national governments in particular, play a very important part here: what policies are they going to put in place so that their citizens can re-train and upskill themselves to increase their chances to find employment in this radically transformed world? There are interesting possibilities around, like the 'Individual Learning Accounts' adopted by France, where a person receives an annual amount of money in an account that can be used to obtain training and increase the likelihood of finding a new job. Like the European Commission, we would be in favour of seeing other governments going in a similar direction.

ALL DIGITAL SUMMIT 2020 took place this month under the theme 'competences for the future', foreseeing a very important role of our jobs and skills in the digital transformation. What impact will this have on the life of associations?

Our Summit offered a platform to take stock of a digital transformation that the pandemic seems to have accelerated by much. In particular, we looked at what lessons could be learned from the lockdown in terms of remote teaching methodology, how the digital competence centres of the future will have to change, how to create a certification system of competences that

is recognised everywhere in the continent. All issues that deal, ultimately, with the employability of people, with their readiness to navigate a new world. The Summit took place for the first time entirely online, with an innovative formula based on the use of a few locations around Europe functioning as broadcasting studios. We found that this formula was very much appreciated and I believe that even once the pandemic is over, we are going to have hybrid events rather than just onsite events as in the past.

What kind of rules and regulations are you expecting from European authorities to further harmonise your sector across member states?

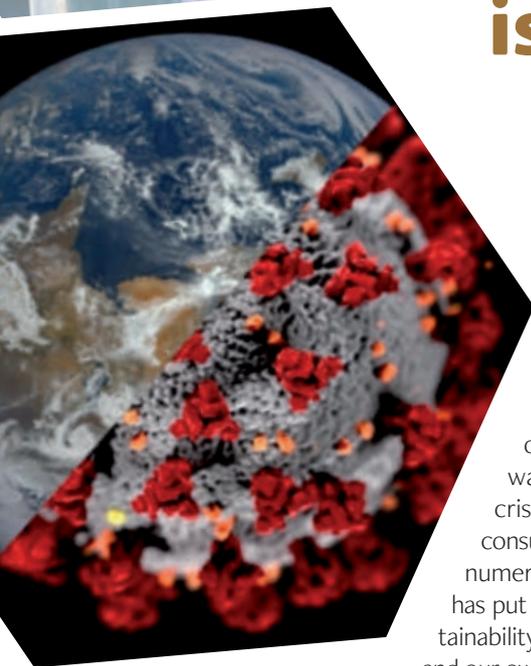
Education and employment are areas of shared competences between the EU and its Member States, with the last word, in most cases, still left to the states. There needs to be, therefore, greater consistency between what the states declare to want when meeting in Brussels, and what they are actually ready to do once back in their own capital cities. For the time being, let us say that at the very least we would expect the European Parliament and the European Council to adopt a Multiannual Financial Framework – the 7-year budget of the EU – that properly funds civil-society-driven initiatives and projects addressing the lifelong learning needs of the population, especially in relation to digital competences.

FOR MORE INFO:

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COVID-19 unleashed a standing alertness towards an uncertain and changing future. Should we take the first step? In a media partnership with *HQ*, **MCI Group** promoted a long discussion about pandemic prevention and preparedness, last September. In a virtual round-table, speakers analysed the big picture - not only for the MICE industry but for the entire world. *Manuel A. Fernandes reports*

PANPREV: What if the **Next Outbreak** is Just Around the Corner?

One of the most striking weaknesses that the COVID-19 crisis brought to light was the fact that our lives are in perfect connection and are interdependent on several levels. The economy was shaken by a massive health crisis, itself partially caused by our consumption habits. And this affected numerous professional sectors, which has put into question our notions of sustainability, environmentalism, technology and our own lifestyle.

In this tangle of concepts, politics has always been in the eye of the storm, accounting for case numbers and percentage rates, enforcing regulations and extraordinary measures, providing economic supporting to various industries. Suddenly, the house of cards collapsed and these ruins gave way to a constant state of alertness, preclusion and, in some cases, panic.

PANPREV, the first interactive roundtable session held and sponsored by MCI and Dorier, was a reflection of this

cross-sectional discussion and this Catch-22 situation in which we find ourselves. The event unfolded through live debates with four speakers in different areas of expertise, an interactive Q&A with the audience, and real-time polls in a premonition of what may be the webinar of the future. In fact, this roundtable stood out both in form and substance, enhancing the dynamics and structure of the conversation, as well as some talking points that also affect the meetings industry. After all, this pandemic has come to the core of our professional nature (finding, gathering, bringing and taking) and it is necessary to keep a holistic approach.

The panel included three health experts and an economist: **Bettina Borisch**, professor at the Institute of Global Health at the University of Geneva and executive director of the World Federation of Public Health Associations; **Ali Mobasher**, professor of Musculoskeletal Biology at the State Research Institute Centre for Innovative Medicine in Vilnius; **Ludovic Subran**, chief economist at the Allianz SE; and **Cobi Reisman**, urologist, sexologist and past president of the European Society for Sexual Medicine.

“Ladies and gentlemen, friends and colleagues, let me give you a stern warning. What we are seeing now looks more and more like a dramatic resurgence of the threat from emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases.

The world is not prepared to cope.” It could be the speech of any responsible political leader in early 2020, correct? None of that! These prophetic words were enunciated by Margaret Chan, the head of the World Health Organization, at the opening ceremony of the WHO assembly... in 2016.

Since then, we have become progressively aware of the importance of health care in our industry. Despite very clear warnings and forecasts, we have failed to control SARS-CoV-2.

This set the tone of what Bettina Borisch said on the macro aspect of our health systems: “We have to learn from our mistakes, otherwise we risk running an even worse pandemic! [...] We cannot divide society. We have to care for risk groups with good health systems in place, free and universal. Health is collective!”

The foreshadowing did not stop with the WHO. In 2018, before a British audience for the 100th anniversary of the deadly Spanish flu, microbiologist Peter Piot asked whether the world was ready for an upcoming pandemic.

The risk of another health crisis in our interconnected world and the shortcomings of pre-existing diseases highlighted a curious aspect. Laura Spinney in “Pale Rider” shows the global perception of the influenza pandemic by the 1920s’ society, unlike what we now witness almost a century later: “When asked what was the biggest disaster of the twentieth century, almost nobody answers the Spanish flu [...] The Spanish flu is remembered personally, not collectively. Not as a historical disaster, but as millions of discrete, private tragedies.”

Privacy belongs to another time in history and that defines the perfect opposition to an era of social media, data sharing and cutting-edge technology. The globalisation and hypercommunication of our lives have transformed a set of ‘private tragedies’ into a single collective, psychological and affective catastrophe. And sexual too, as Cobi Reisman explained: “At a time when mental health and intimacy are factors left to the background, single people is facing the most challenges. Contact is essential, not letting ourselves be contaminated by fear is a step forward. We should not call this a ‘new normal’.”

The economic costs are yet to be calculated,

but Ludovic Subran does not foresee an optimistic scenario: “In this twilight zone, trying to find reason in the midst of chaos is the key. In the event of a second wave, we should expect several bankruptcies and a rampant rise in unemployment. This will change behaviors as shockingly as climate change”. However, he also acknowledged: “Somehow this crisis has also revealed the better side of people, it forces us to see that the rules of the game are the rules that we want. In the response to this crisis, I can see so much policy innovation.”

In terms of priorities, Ali Mobasher is blunt: “In my opinion, there needs to be other measures and GDP is a grossly outdated one. We need to think in a more global stance about responsibility to the environment in the context of one health. Increase awareness and be prepared.”

Bettina Borisch calls for the emergency of a ‘new social contract’ and for not giving up on organisations’ social missions. “We have to encourage a system thinking approach that lives outside the multiple boxes in which we put ‘climate’, ‘health’, ‘economy’, ‘politics’. It’s all interconnected,” she concluded.

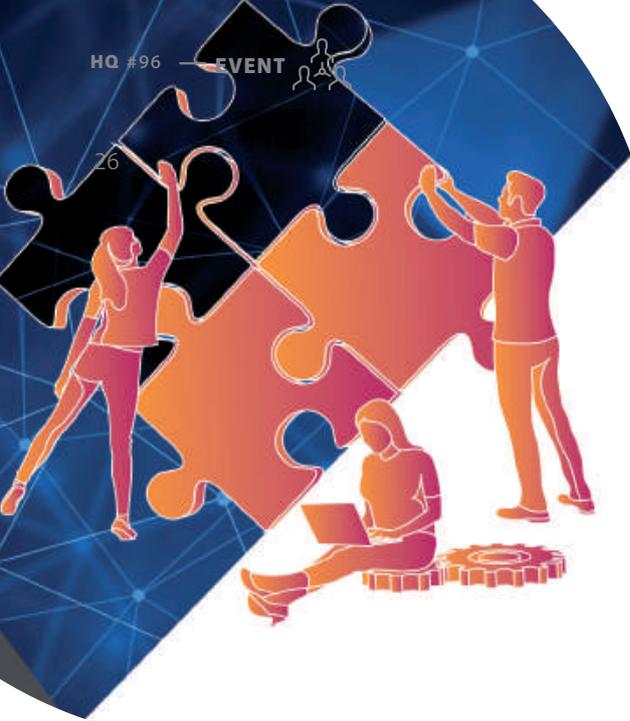
Our industry has something to learn: survival depends on this awareness, poise and decision-making. By the time the next pandemic is around the corner, it may be too late!

Curious about this discussion? See the first first online round-table here: [icppp.org](https://www.icppp.org)



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Coming of Age: ECM Summer School Becomes 2.0

For 33 years, the ECM Summer School has been a flagship event in the meetings industry. This year, the tradition was broken and attendees met online to discuss the way towards a sustainable and smart recovery. Read HQ's report to find out what we learned from the three-day session.

Emanuela Barbiroglio and Manuel Fernandes report

We all grow, so does the meetings industry. And after 33 years, ECM has developed an additional event dedicated to advanced Meetings Industry professionals: the Summer School 2.0.

“*Krisis* in ancient Greek means also new decisions and new opportunities,” reads the letter from Pier Paolo Mariotti, the course director, and Petra Stušek, president of European Cities Marketing (ECM). “Therefore, we have set up in a few weeks a new version dedicated to advanced meetings industry professionals including the Summer School alumni, called ECM Summer School 2.0.”

Aimed to bring the industry closer, it's been a special edition spread onto three days from August 24th to 26th for a total of six hours. It was tailored for advanced professionals of the industry working in convention bureaux, hotels, PCOs, DMCs, airlines, conference venues, congress centres, convention centres, exhibition centres, suppliers of ancillary, and also left room for

debating and connecting, with breakouts and in-depth Q&A.

The afternoon programme was distributed in a plenary session and three parallel ‘rooms’ chosen by the participants. In particular, two subjects caught HQ's attention.

Clients and suppliers

On the second day, strategies and purchasing changes for associations and corporate clients dominated the manuals of the first two sessions, led by Daniel Waigl, executive director of CIRSE, Mathias Sondermann and Silke Lauermann, both at SAP. Contingency planning for congresses, infection numbers according to travel restrictions and onsite logistics were just some of the themes dissected.

In the corporate clients chapter, Mathias and Silke guided us through some impact considerations in the relationship between risk, opportunity and needs. By the example of SAP, the different key attributes were identified by the size of their different event

tiers (local, regional and global). They also looked at the chronological evolution of the virtual event in the coming years, recognizing that we are still in the first steps of a transversal model for event management.

In the last part of the session, Sissi Lygnou, IAPCO's ambassador, dealt with PCOs, responsiveness and best practices in the meetings industry. Sissi discussed the new realities and the focus shift in the various industries, alongside digital content, hybrid adaptations and the pressing need for physical events.

In the last parallel session, we decided to “sit in the convention centre”, where we had as speakers Pier Paolo Mariotti and former ECM vice-president and now Chief Operating Officer at CCH - Congress Center Hamburg, Heike Mahmoud, in a convincing presentation on new regulations for venues and event spaces. When to reopen business events in accordance with the new COVID-19 requirements? How to adjust the various types of regulations in Europe? How can we give back to the communities



without stripping the basic nature of a convention centre?

As final notes, three essential points were retained for the various interdisciplinary teams in our industry: never underestimate a risk plan, quickly prepare a crisis communication plan, provide training and education to our staff.

Sustainability

During the third and last day of presentations, the topic of sustainability was touched. Guy Bigwood, managing director of the Global Destination Sustainability Movement and GuBi Consulting, mentioned a research conducted in partnership between IMEX and Marriott and gave us some eye opening insights.

“This all raises the big question: is it the end of the meetings industry as we know it? I think this creates the right environment for us to push the button to reset our industry and really rethink what the future could look like,” he said. “So I’m proposing that sustainability as we know it is dead, or should be buried. Rest in peace sustainability, we need a new focus and reimagine the way we organise our events.”

Our own attitude has been changing, from degenerative to sustainable, to - finally - regenerative. Being flawless is no longer enough and we must create new business models, and this is the best time to start.

The case study of Göteborg was then presented by Katarina Thorstensson, smart tourism and sustainability strategist at Göteborg & Co. She explained that environment-friendly travelling has been at the core of the Swedish city for a long time, however things changed completely during the last decade.

“In the mid ‘80s the Environment Minister of Sweden challenged the city of Göteborg

by naming us a ‘courtyard to hell’ due to heavy pollution. Some kind of call to action,” Thorstensson added. “The challenge was accepted. Tourism and sustainability haven’t met before, but in 2010 we started a new project called ‘Sustainable Göteborg meetings and events’ initiative.”

“One really important part is to integrate sustainability within the business plan and the collaboration knowledge. We always think that everyone should benefit from our industry.”

As the EU is heading towards the green deal and a sustainable recovery, digitalisation and resilience are keywords for members of ECM. The Summer School 2.0 was entirely part of this revolution.

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FOR MORE INFO ABOUT SUMMER SCHOOL 2.0

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▼ Screenshot of Summer School 2.0



28 **ECM is an Example** for the Meetings Industry

This year taught us that the event and travel industries needed more creative and innovative thinkers to stick to the constant changing world we are evolving in. And that's precisely what is driving ECM with its 'Tomorrow Today' strategy. The webinars series, virtual meetings, ECM mentor programme, the ECM Summer School 2.0 and other digital events showed that the impossible happens and we'll get through this together.

Innovation means finding new ideas or methods and creating advances in offers, techniques or fields. At ECM, we perfectly understand the challenges of innovation and technology and we want to stick to the constant changing world we are evolving in. 2020 has been a tough but also inspirational year for the meetings industry. The COVID-19 situation pushed us to create new innovative content and ground-breaking new forms of meetings and conferences. Our objective? To stay relevant and provide support to our members but also to the Industry worldwide.

During the ECM Summer School 2.0, Mathias Sondermann, senior director head of Events Programs and Experience at SAP, highlighted that virtual environments offer actually more opportunities in terms of audience and space. Even if traditional events remain a powerful way to build connections and we are looking forward to physically meeting again, the online world allows us unlimited prospects in the reach of people since we can truly talk to a global audience in different time zones. There is no limit of time in terms of duration. We cannot let a virtual conference last 24 hours but we can find ways to reach our audience with different digital content and diverse durations. Compared to a physical event, we are not limited in the numbers of meeting rooms in time and we can actually provide all the content we want to our audience, when we want and as much as we want.

#aNewTomorrow virtual initiatives

“#aNewTomorrow, ECM COVID-19 antibodies for your destination”, is a virtual

communication campaign established to be a strong response to the crisis. The goal is to grab the opportunity of digital channels and physical distancing to produce relevant virtual support tools for our members and the whole Industry.

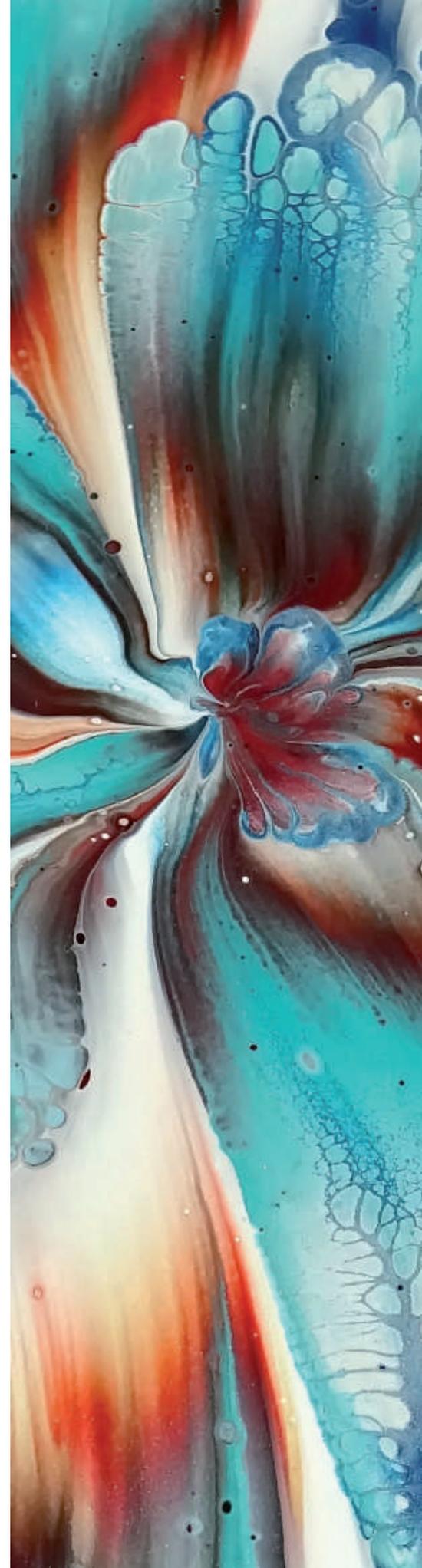
The purpose of the #aNewTomorrow initiative is to share ideas and challenges and find inspiration in new practices and different approaches throughout various supports as webinars, articles, collaborative dashboards, Zoom conversations and discussion groups, our digital COVID-19 Resource Centre - which form a critical part of the capability and potential of the association.

Throughout this initiative, ECM offered their members and virtual participants various relevant content directly or indirectly related to the COVID-19 crisis. The objective was preparing our industry for the tomorrow that will come, trying to understand challenges and transforming them into opportunities. ECM invited avant-gardes thinkers to digitally talk about themes such as innovation and marketing strategies during recovery, travel influencers' key role during the crisis, tourism innovation, experience economy, the future of sustainability, etc.

#aNewTomorrow revealed itself as a strong and pertinent digital tool, which responds to the needs of ECM members, and as a valuable source of information for all our colleagues and friends in the DMMO industry.

The ECM Summer School 2.0

After 33 years of physical events, the ECM Summer School has gone digital for three



days in August 2020. ECM decided to seize the opportunity and create a new virtual format for this traditional event and dedicate this initiative to all established professionals of the meetings industry.

These three days have been an insightful and inspirational journey into the strategic outlooks for the meetings industry, the world of clients and suppliers and a new vision of what we call “smart recovery”. During the third day of this virtual (but still very real) journey, we talked about the digital evolution of events, the contribution of innovation in creating new forms of fully-virtual or hybrid events, sustainability in these new paradigms and what really means “sustainable” in the current era...

The first edition of the ECM Summer School 2.0 has been a vibrant chance to learn and to get filled with good vibes and interactions. This event has clearly shown the relevance and power of virtual and hybrid meetings. CIRSE’s executive director Daniel Waigl brought forward during his session the idea that hybrid-meetings will be a possible choice in the future for the meetings industry. However, he also stated that they will not entirely replace face-to-face interaction, a statement backed-up by IMEX Group’s CEO Carina Bauer in another session.

Moving to adapting our events to the digital world

A great educational event took place digitally in September: the Virtual International Seminar organised jointly by ECM with the European Travel Commission (ETC) and

Modul University Vienna.

This 2-day online gave participants the chance to discuss crucial issues in the current agenda of most tourism organisations: the tourism path to recovery post-COVID-19. This online seminar provided an exceptional platform for knowledge-sharing on mitigating strategies to assist in the sustainable recovery of tourism, while it looked into innovation and big data to support the exit path of the crisis.

TIC Expert Meeting 2020

Similarly, the Tourist Information Centres (TIC) Expert Meeting, dedicated to TIC managers and staff (whether they are ECM members or not) has turned out to be a digital event in 2020, spread on 3 morning sessions.

This year’s event has been focusing on the crucial topic of adaptation and innovation in crisis time, with a mix of best-practices from ECM members (Rotterdam and Helsinki), exclusive presentations by inspiring speakers and some breakout rooms discussions to exchange in smaller groups on a specific topic. This has been a strong opportunity for participants to keep on the dialogue and get some inspiration from their European peers on how to cope with the crisis and its impacts, as customer service providers.

It seems that this new way to share content virtually is not only a fashion but might remain a permanent way to see the world of the meetings industry. Even if the sanitarian protocols might ease in the future, our industry may switch from an only-physical way to do meetings and events to a more hybrid one. For the moment, we can say for sure that our recent online events showed us that the impossible happens and we’ll get through this together.



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The ECM Mentor Programme

ECM has also launched, during the ECM Summer School 2.0, the first edition of the Mentor Programme. A free industry supported initiative created to secure networking, relation-building and knowledge-exchange between newly-appointed and advanced professionals in the meetings industry.

The current raging of COVID-19 across the globe has already had enormous consequences on the meetings industry. It has resulted in the cancellation and postponement of, not only congresses and conventions, but also the majority of industry events that we normally would attend throughout a year. In close collaboration with industry partners, IAPCO, IBTM, ICCA, IMEX and HQ Magazine, the ECM Mentor Programme is meant to be one of the collaborative solutions in this unprecedented period. Newly-appointed and advanced professionals will have the opportunity, firstly virtually and hopefully physically in the future, to interact, inspire, share and grow together in the meetings industry. You can find more information on this 12-month project on ECM website.

5 Reasons We Need Measurement Tools for Regeneration

The meetings and events industry is a critical catalyst for the global recovery from COVID-19. It promotes the spread of knowledge within other industries and creates spaces for innovation and collaboration.



Noah Joubert is a sustainability consultant of the Global Destination Sustainability Movement, which unites and enables destination management professionals to create flourishing and resilient places to visit, meet and live in.

As set out in the JMIC Global Manifesto, we as an industry need to demonstrate to decision-makers the positive impacts we bring to society and the economy, to accelerate the recovery of the business meetings market. Furthermore, we need to demonstrate that such a recovery can be sustainable, green, and even regenerative. We need to usher in the era of the responsible delegate and the responsible destination.

Tools and technologies for tracking progress and monitoring performance are key in creating the value-proposition that shows our industry is committed to a regenerative recovery. For instance, OMNI is the online IT platform the GDS-Index uses to measure the sustainability performance of destinations and to monitor changes in their performance.

So, what are the key benefits of these types of tools? And how can they help destination management organisations (DMOs) to leverage support from their city councils?

1. Benchmark sustainability performance

In order to decide where to go, we need to know where we are and what we are capable of. Monitoring and measurement tools can serve to benchmark your performance and compare it with others. This is the first step of tracking one's progress. In the case of VisitAarhus in Denmark, the city's mayor has started to use the GDS-Index benchmark to gauge the city's sustainability progress.

2. Monitor performance

Monitoring tools also help highlight opportunities. In the case of OMNI, it helps identify sustainability weak spots and to propose which actions a DMO can take to improve their performance. Monitoring technologies can also highlight the alignment or misalignment between a DMO and its local sustainability agenda.

3. Communicate with data

By tracking their performance using common performance indicators, destinations can identify with ease which actions have had an impact worth sharing. If a DMO performs

exceptionally well for some indicators, it can become a best practice example for the rest of the industry, serve as valuable marketing content and become a point of pride for a whole destination.

4. Make informed decisions

To make responsible decisions, we have to be well-informed and weigh the pros and cons of a potential outcome. This includes the creation of strategies and the setting of goals. Monitoring tools can help bring together disparate data points into a cohesive overview and so bring clarity into the decision-making process.

5. Detect the problem to avoid disaster

Through monitoring and regular assessments, one can identify not only minor weaknesses that should be improved, but also bigger problems that if left unattended could negatively impact an organisation and its stakeholders. In this sense, monitoring tools and technologies can serve like canaries in coal mines, as delivering early-warning signals before irreparable damage is caused.



Seizing the Opportunity of Quality (Virtual) Education

No matter the size, scope, or type of a virtual meeting, the online world has gifted us the opportunity to easily capture all the content that is presented at events.

Which in turn opens new doors for impactful continuous education.

What associations can do is use the captured content to advance their educational offering. As a first step, it can be repurposed to update (or create) an e-Library. Distributing materials within the community can then make the education more accessible and scalable to individual objectives and schedules. But it will be so much more exciting for the learner to have a long-term, strategically designed path that can support their continuous education.

Curriculum

Online, we are given the advantage to personalise the learning course for each individual. The strategy of this newly revamped education has to be built as a curriculum – a purposefully designed road that each learner will take to arrive at a predetermined level of expertise. Associations can create engaging learning tracks for their different target audiences, with overlapping courses wherever it makes sense. Additionally, while building this

curriculum, associations don't have to actually reach an endpoint. While there will be a desired outcome to arrive at, if the society adopts a forward-looking mindset, milestones can be set where associations will review and upgrade the program (for example between annual conferences). This will ensure that the path is constantly updated with global knowledge and continues to offer growth to members, no matter where and when they decide to embark on the journey.

Formats

The offering should include a mix of educational formats, such as online courses, webinars, micro-learning modules, with bite-sized and in-depth analysis sessions. Practical hands-on tasks will ensure that new education leads to new skills. Providing such a blend, along with options for discussion forums and Q&A sessions with tutors, will create a nurturing and all-encompassing environment for the learner, improving their knowledge, skills and

competencies. Especially for lifelong learning, the trends change as the pace of our day-to-day changes, new technologies emerge and there are constant possibilities to satisfy the need for knowledge in an interesting and captivating manner.

Quality

A high-quality learning experience can be created only with dedicated work and attention to the needs of association members. To create such a program requires resources and collaboration between different experts. Once the curriculum is determined, timely reviews of the goals and objectives of the audience will be required, as well as the clear understanding that this is not a set product, but a service to members that evolves together with associations.



ABOUT KENES GROUP

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

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How Associations Can Harness Technology and Online Events

While technology plays an ever-growing role in the way associations manage their operations and meetings, the COVID-19 pandemic has sent many associations scurrying to make a shift. But how can associations leverage technology and, in particular, online events? Some of the partners of the World PCO Alliance recently shared their thoughts on how associations can best integrate technology so that they survive not only during the pandemic, but in the long-term.

André Viotor of Bco Congressos, feels that technology is simply “a must” for any association wishing to thrive in the 21st century. “They need to continue providing services to their membership,” Viotor says, “in particular access to education and providing CME and CPD credits through virtual conferences or e-learning platforms, or they risk becoming irrelevant.”

Those associations that were already leveraging technology in their processes have fared better at riding the wave of the current pandemic. Many others, however, have found themselves scrambling to adjust to the new way of doing things. Regardless of which category your association falls into, there is no doubt that COVID-19 has changed the way you do business. Gregg Talley from Talley Management Group, says that this has been the greatest issue facing associations: “If your organisation was not already moving in this direction, then the pandemic exposed some real challenges, both in terms of technological capability and the team resources to manage and support it.”

But hold on, before investing in the shiniest tools, Jean-Paul de Lavison of JPdL, cautions associations to use a strategic approach. “We like to call it a digital transformation,” de Lavison says. “Technology selection

and how the technology will be used are key things that an association should assess.” Moreover, long-term and short-term needs can be very different. In the short-term, some associations are facing the challenge of making it through the next year. A long-term strategy may require broader changes and considerations. As a general rule, though, de Lavison advises associations to adopt tools that are scalable and flexible.

While meetings and events are a cornerstone of any association’s activity, the pandemic has brought almost all face-to-face events to a screeching halt. Yet, considering that many associations depend on their congress income to survive and that congresses fulfill the associations’ educational mandates, dropping events is out of the question. While some conferences were already adding a virtual element to their programs, everyone seems to have virtual events in mind these days. As with in-person events, online conferences require a vision and a strategic approach that will ensure the event complements the general mission of the associations as well as serves their membership.

De Lavison reminds us that technology is but a small part of the equation. “Delivering an experience online can be done in different ways and budgets can

vary wildly,” he says. “Focus on how you want it to work before deciding what the tool will be.” He also recommends mastering the art of storytelling and delivering content in a format similar to a talk show. “Remember that you are dealing with digital attention spans, so smaller doses of information work best.”

Also, Gregg Talley urges associations to consider a virtual event as any in-person event. “You have to build a team,” he says. “Like any live event, you want to create those WOW moments. You want to offer your attendees the time, space and opportunity to connect virtually.”

Nancy Tan of Ace: Daytons Direct, finds that, for simple virtual meetings, the most cost-effective and user-friendly tool is Zoom (with certain limitations). For those associations looking for a solution that can deliver a more complex event, including virtual exhibition and business networking, there are other platforms like MICEair. A complete virtual and hybrid event management platform, MICEair is helping Ace:Daytons Direct’s corporate and association clients organise virtual conferences and exhibitions as well as hybrid events. “MICEair can bring meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibits on air with end to end pre-event, live day and post-event

video-on-demand,” Tan says.

For André Vietor, regardless of the tool associations select, the important thing is that it is user-friendly for them as organizers. “And the tool should provide an enjoyable attendee experience while optimising interaction and engagement.”

While selecting the right platform might seem like a daunting task, virtual events are undoubtedly an exciting opportunity. Jean-Paul de Lavisson adds: “Virtual environments offer endless possibilities for the creation of highly personalised sponsorship experiences that can help you renew and solidify financial support for your association.”

Navigating change is one of the most common challenges for associations. And change in a technological context can be particularly intricate. With their expertise, professional conference organisers (PCOs) can help associations assess their needs as well as any tools associations are considering. Beyond this, many PCOs have established relationships with suppliers and can leverage

these relationships for their clients. “We have secured relationships with technology partners to allow incremental improvements to enable us to customise and deliver solutions at a variety of budgets, complexity and available time,” de Lavisson says.

Forecasting trends is something that many association teams simply do not have the time to do, but it’s another benefit of partnering with a PCO. Realising that virtual events were suddenly a necessity with the onset of the pandemic, Talley and his team acted quickly. “We hired a specialist in virtual event strategy to work with our teams and clients,” he says. “Now we are designing hybrid events for 2021 and 2022.”

But whether associations tackle technology on their own or with the support of a PCO, technology is undoubtedly a game-changing tool for associations. “It’s a whole new world,” Talley concludes. “But one brimming with possibility for your association and members.”



World PCO Alliance

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🌐 WORLDPCO.ORG





Membership engagement is central to an association, and that member experience is at a crossroads. Many associations were already online, but COVID-19 has brought all other organisations as well. Associations who used their events as the rhythm of their year, are now on high speed with weekly global webinars rather than annual regional conferences. Can we keep up? Do we want to? Should we change? Jeffery London speaks with the expert in online facilitation, Héctor Villarreal Lozoya, about moving associations online.

Membership Engagement: Keeping People Connected

Jeffery London: How has COVID-19 impacted your association?

Héctor Villarreal Lozoya: The first big shock was postponing our global conference to 2021, but that was just the beginning. We are an association of facilitators, so working with groups defines our profession. Suddenly, members lost 20-100% of their work - not only putting membership fees at risk, but their livelihood and our entire relevance as the **International Association of Facilitators (IAF)**. Our minds were busy setting up resources to help people migrate their facilitation online, while our hearts were occupied hosting group forums to deal with the trauma and transition.

JL: How are you approaching events now?

HVL: The frequency of virtual facilitated events skyrocketed by our association and by our members. We play a connector role, making us a remedy for social distancing. We are mostly a traditional organisation. Many of our members lack deep remote facilitation skills and the technology changes have been exponential, so we are educating ourselves and our clients, while supporting other organisations to make connections virtually. Back-to-school is the typical restart of the event season, yet we see that many are already tired of Zoom calls. I think people are realising that online sessions actually take more time to prepare and that we still need spectacular events to offset all the average unengaging video conference calls.

JL: Where do facilitation experts go to learn?

HVL: Mostly from one another, connecting with others. Each of our annual regional conferences drew hundreds of participants. People travelled to

connect and learn. As local events went online, regional boundaries dissolved. For example, Facilitation Week, our October celebration, had more than 150 local events last year. This year it's an online global phenomena that individuals everywhere can lead or participate in. The reach has grown and people go to the highest quality events, regardless of distance.

JL: Tell me more about Facilitation Week?

HVL: There will be keynotes, collaboration platforms, hundreds of events on everything from group work to mindfulness and participatory practices to leadership. As sponsorship and volunteerism has gone up, most sessions are free. You can list your facilitated events there too, or just tweet them with #FacWeek. A favourite part is the facilitation impact award ceremony, an online gala to celebrate the people who have made an outstanding impact through facilitation. There's much to learn for association leaders, as these projects showcase how facilitation transforms organisations and communities. You can preview some of the awardees in the #facilitationhasimpact films.

JL: Advice for making spectacular online events?

HVL: The "wow effect" is often from polished media, like TED talks or the streaming of Cirque du Soleil. That's hard to compete with, but it is far from the reality of most groups' issues, meetings, or capabilities. Most people at work need a decision, an action plan, a result. Sometimes, just getting everyone to agree is spectacular! The power of facilitation is in the alignment, engagement and momentum it builds. There's a lot of experimentation now - holographic events, virtual reality, RunTheWorld, Hopin - not to mention upgrades of MS Teams,

Webex and others as they play catch-up with Zoom. Going forward, I think we will see the gimmicks fade and an expectation that we can all create quality online events. In the end a great online event is the result of human connection, just like when we are face-to-face. People need to connect and feel part of a tribe. Technology is an enabler, but the magic is in the facilitation. As facilitators, we know we have to be #betterthannetflix if we want to compete for people's screen time.

JL: How is this reshaping your organisation's strategy and structure?

HVL: Although I'm no longer an active board member, I think the impact will be long lasting. It hasn't only accelerated our virtual offerings, it made us also rethink our role. The IAF sets the standard for facilitation, but those standards are shifting. Our members have had to become more agile and we need to do the same. As facilitators, we love asking revealing questions. What do our members need now? How can one association be indispensable? Has our target member shifted? What could the membership experience look like? Where will our future revenue come from? How can we be more relevant or useful? We are still working on the answers, but what is clear is the world wants to know how to best facilitate progress, and we are reshaping the way we host that conversation.

JL: How do you see the membership experience changing?

HVL: Our members look for three big things: community, credentials, and learning. Going virtual transforms each of these. Physical events were our lifeblood as they delivered members what they wanted and kept us afloat. Our members now have the option to be online with us non-stop, yet some are more isolated. It is up to the member to get involved. We have all kinds of special interest groups and forums, most of which are initiatives of the members themselves. So we

try to entice and invite involvement and we bring more to more people, if they choose to tune in. Keynotes are streamed to home, collaboration is online, content is at the end of a keyboard. There is a sad nostalgic need for a hug among some, but I think we offered hope to many who needed a community and helped them apply their talents online.

JL: Is there hope in technology?

HVL: I've been a technology *aficionado* since 1985, when my dad brought home an "IBM XT Turbo" with a green screen. Tech possibilities excite me. Well implemented technology, working alongside human connection, accelerates transformation exponentially. The learnings of the crisis are already getting integrated into engagement strategies. Future face-to-face will be better thanks to our digital capacity. I see this in the people I train and mentor: they are better off and make a bigger impact, which gives me hope. In the end, it's not about technology or the event, it is about the connection.

Héctor is the former Director of Conferences and Events at the International Association of Facilitators (IAF). Check out his services at proyectum.com and virtualfacilitation.com. Jeffer is a facilitator at the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) For insights into the facilitation of engagement, see Jeffer's blog about [#stimulatingconversation](https://www.jeffer-london.com) at jeffer-london.com.



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FOR MORE INFO:
CCL.ORG
IAF-WORLD.ORG

International Association of Facilitators (IAF)

iaf-world.org/virtualfacilitation
Virtual facilitation resources, events and community support facilitators. Tools and techniques, as well as people who can help you use them.

Meeting Planners International (MPI)

www.mpi.org/tools/coronavirus
Updates, education and whitepapers on designing events in COVID-19 times. Includes podcasts and recorded events, as well as all the MPI resources.

Facilitation Week

#FacWeek, facweek.org
19-25 October with platform open into November 2020. A participatory experience that inspires synergy and celebrates the act of group facilitation.





From the Tennis Court to IBTM World Virtual: Climate Action

IBTM announced former tennis professional Pancho Campo as first keynote speaker, with a strong commitment for the environment and climate action. Besides, they launched a new-look TechWatch Live for innovative business owners to potentially gain future financial and mentorship.

Former tennis professional turned high profile events producer, with more than 30 years' experience, Pancho Campo will be the first keynote speaker for IBTM World Virtual 2020.

“Although the current situation is worrying, the future is bright,” Pancho said. “I’m very much looking forward to participating in IBTM World Virtual and discussing innovative ideas and where all these changes might take us as an industry.”

Pancho will talk about how to run an event with high profile attendees and share practical solutions in a presentation titled ‘The future of events: Lessons learned from working with Barack Obama’. He will also discuss how event organisers can adapt in a COVID-19 world and give valuable insight into what events of the future might look like.

Originally from Santiago, Chile, Pancho participated in the 1992 summer Olympics

in Barcelona as a coach for the Chilean team. Three years later, he retired from tennis to set up his events management company, Chrand Marketing & Events. He initially worked on sporting events, but later expanded to music.

His interest in the environment and climate change led him to meet former US vice-president Al Gore, Barack Obama and the secretary-general of the UN Kofi Annan. During lockdown, Pancho produced a virtual climate change conference called Marbella Futuro 2020, one of the first online summits to take place under lockdown restrictions.

“We know that his session will be insightful and valuable to attendees and we are delighted that he will be speaking at IBTM World Virtual,” David Thompson, event director at IBTM World, added.

Meanwhile, the organisers launched a new concept for the Tech Watch Awards this

year: TechWatch Live. It will feature live pitching during IBTM World Virtual for five technology business owners, who will be able to present their company and product or service to the judging panel and audience of event professionals. Financial support and mentorship will be assigned at the discretion of a judging panel.

Dahlia El Gazzar, founder of the DAHLIA+Agency, is the new chair of the judging panel. “Now more than ever, we are being asked to be innovative,” she said. “And with everything going on, we want to properly celebrate those tech companies that have gone above and beyond to help eventprofs in this time of need.”

The judges are now looking for entries “which demonstrate innovation, a sound concept/business model and value to the MICE industry”.

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How to Network in a Virtual Era

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Whether we like it or not, the virtual era for meetings and events started. With the arrival of COVID-19, the whole MICE industry has been turned upside down and, within a matter of days, an entire industry that prides itself on its face-to-face connections and networks had to immerse itself fully in the world of technology.

While technology has been playing an increasing role in all our events for the last decade, it has almost always been considered as a 'nice to have' or an 'add on'. Live streaming of events has been happening for years, but there is a difference. While the audio-visual consultants may have been contacted once a venue was confirmed, this dynamic has completely switched and now they are contacted before a programme is even fully planned. Their expertise is now front and centre and they help shape, design and implement the overall running of the event. However, if how we attend association conferences and events may have changed for now, the top two reasons for attending remain the same: education and networking.

Amazing platforms, enhanced technology and the innovative way in which associations and event planners have restructured their events, make the education content of a conference just as strong in the virtual world as it would have been face-to-face.

On the other hand, networking has proved harder to transition into the virtual world from face-to-face. The MICE industry was built on face-to-face interactions. We pride ourselves on the connections, networks and knowledge sharing that take place at our conferences during the coffee break or the gala dinner or a technical visit. So how can we ensure this networking takes place in a virtual world?

In my opinion, there is categorically no replacement for face-to-face networking

and the connections that can be made in person. But, as COVID-19 and virtual events are here to stay for another while yet, it's important that we harness the power of technology to the best of our ability. I've highlighted a few points below that I find useful in this new virtual world.

Fail to prepare = prepare to fail

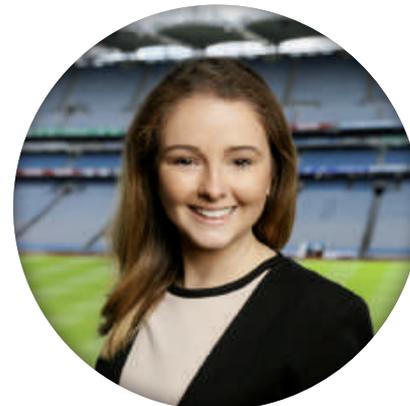
Before attending the virtual conference, do your research, check out who else is attending, who is presenting, what topics are you most interested in. Pull the delegate list (if applicable) and reach out even before the conference starts to arrange meetings. Virtual networking requires even more planning and timing as the chances of running into someone during the lunch break is now gone. You need to know who, when and how you want to interact with people. Fill up your time wisely.

Broadcast

Utilise your own social media network to broadcast your attendance before, during and after the conference. This will let people within your network know that you will be there and that you want to catch up. Use the hashtag and upload screenshots.

Download the app and USE IT!

Almost all virtual events come with a downloadable app, so use it. Fill in the bio fully and always upload a picture. They might not get to physically see you, but at least they know there is an actual person behind the computer. Utilise the app to arrange



Gráinne Ni Ghiollagain

Co-Founder of Meetings + Millenials

meetings and campfire sessions. Don't wait for people to contact you, reach out.

Engage

Engage in real-time with presenters, MCs and other delegates, ask questions, write comments, give feedback. Also utilise the private messaging field and reach out to contacts and ask their opinion, share interesting articles and insights. Gamification is just as popular in the virtual world as it is in the face-to-face world so contribute and participate. If the virtual conference offers a matchmaking service, again, use it.

Follow up

As with any conference, follow up is very important. Email your contacts directly, thank them for helping you get the most of the conference, connect with them on social media channels and arrange follow up calls.

Hopefully the above pointers help direct you in this new virtual world! I'd love to hear how you are finding networking in this virtual world - so please be in contact!



FOR MORE INFO:

 [MEETINGSANDMILLENNIALS.COM](https://www.meetingsandmillennials.com)

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Cooperation is Key to Innovation

The pandemic made innovation more important than ever as we try to find new ways to keep business going. The International Association of Convention Centers (AIPC) is a global network of more than 185 leading centres in 60 countries, so how is the new CEO **Sven Bossu** managing this unprecedented challenge? Drawing from his extensive experience in international associations, Bossu shared his views on innovation in the association context with *HQ*.



SVEN BOSSU

CEO of The International
Association of Convention Centers
(AIPC)

How is AIPC fostering innovation as an international association?

AIPC is in an interesting position: both its members and the association are being challenged on number of fronts. What products and services to offer, which business model to apply, how to retain customers, etc? And just like its members, AIPC is going through a fundamental change process with the ambition not only to support its members in every way possible, but also to create an agile long term value proposal which is in line with the changing requirements of our members. AIPC is currently rolling out a 6-pillar change process, touching on almost every aspect of the association except one: the ambition to stimulate management excellence with our members. One of the pillars is the new value proposition for our members: what do they need now and in the future and what will it take to deliver upon those needs. The first results were visible in preparation for our annual conference that took place at the end of September.

How can an association support its members in developing and implementing innovative working practices and providing a platform for innovation?

I believe associations can do so in three ways.

First of all, use the association as a platform

for sharing knowledge. All too often, we try to achieve the same ambition in perfect isolation. And given the highly competitive climate, that is understandable. From a cost/effectiveness perspective however, it might be more interesting to share information amongst members and discuss the different options possible. AIPC offers those opportunities for debate via different channels and has the ambition to stimulate this ‘community of practice’ even further. This year AIPC organised a series of regional outreach webinars to allow the members to share their experiences on COVID-19 and discuss best practices in managing the pandemic.

Secondly, an association represents the combined strength of all its members. In this capacity it is able to attract resources which might otherwise not be accessible for individual members, such as research, specialists, education, data, etc.

Thirdly, the association needs to lead by example, by questioning itself continuously and stimulating its members to do so – this will result in a more articulated value proposal, based on the voice of our customers – our members.

COVID-19 is having an unprecedented impact on the meeting industry. What is the role of innovation in alleviating the impact of the pandemic for the sector?

Again, there are three.

First of all, we need to regain the trust of local authorities and organisers that events can take place in a safe and secure way. This will require some creative thinking, especially as we still want to deliver unique experiences and networking opportunities to the participants.

Secondly, we need to realise that hybrid events are not going away any time soon. Therefore, we need to find ways to interconnect live and virtual and also find ways to demonstrate the value of this in terms of ROI, engagement and impact.

Thirdly, we will need to think outside the box and develop an enriched service offering with the help of data. We can already see that data has created new business opportunities which we never would have thought of a couple of decades ago. Data will enable us to develop new business models, create better customer experiences and make

better decisions. Just as an example: technology deployed for safety & health reasons can also be used to understand on-site customer behavior better – for example in terms of flow – and allow us to act upon it almost instantly.

What are the best ways for associations to provide more value to their members?

Listen to your members. To put it in the terms of the classic value proposition design: understand what their pains are, what they want to achieve and how they are trying to get that done. Associations need to have a service offering that addresses those needs. This can be at times difficult because the world we knew so well has changed so much. But it is during times like these when associations can demonstrate their unique value - by bringing together their community, combining their members strengths and taking them to the next level. This is also the ambition of AIPC.

As outlined by Bossu, our current operating environment might be unprecedented, but the basics for innovation have not changed: listen to your members and their needs, encourage cooperation and lead by example. Associations are collaborative by nature and during these difficult times, we are stronger together.

Does your association need support or strategic guidance through the crisis? Get in touch!



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Seismic Shifts

for Associations: the Acceleration of Innovation

Written by Ajay Bhojwani, managing director of MCI Middle East



In a world where technology and social media allow individuals to gather information and network online, professional associations are already evolving their offering to members in order to stay relevant. And now with the current pandemic impacting all of us, it has further accelerated associations to fast track their move in the space of technology to ensure their offering is even more relevant, available and allowing their members to have access to all resources.

Every morning we start our day with getting news headlines, social media updates and emails through the smartphones, which pushes organisations to ensure that whatever they offer - learning programs, publications and more - are all compatible at the touch of the proverbial button.

Associations need to ensure that technology is integrated internally and externally so that the experience is seamless, and their staff are ready to put this offering forward to their members. You cannot offer something in the best possible manner when you are not adapting or using it. So what does this internal and external mean? It basically brings the ecosystem of the association together - talents that work for the association, members and customers, its products and services, the stakeholders that comprise volunteers and supporting organisations and the government institutions. Before COVID-19 changed the world we live in, associations continued to focus on

innovation, working around the globe through a mobile workforce and recognising the importance of data privacy, ensuring they had the right policies and infrastructure to make this happen. However, now we have a seismic shift in the way associations operate; with the changing dynamics, these trends have further evolved, and the next 12 to 18 months will bring forward the following:

- 1. Digital transformation** - which will mean not only having associations run their programs digitally but ensuring everything they do is seamless and connected digitally in a holistic manner. Staff will need to be Re or Upskilled; tools and applications will need to be in place to make their work effective. Integration, convergence and seamlessness will be the mantra.
- 2. Remote workforce** - The 'work from home' ideology brings in a new definition to a mobile workforce which will have a long lasting impact even beyond the pandemic. Organisations have found a new working experience, and this will replace large offices and infrastructure for many organisations in the future.
- 3. AI and BI** - With so many programs and events being run virtually, two key focus areas will be the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Business Intelligence (BI). Whilst AI will help customise the offering and cater to individual needs, BI

will assist associations to collect and analyse the data to be more effective in connecting with their members.

- 4. Mobile first offering** - Everything being offered from training to events to publications as well as meetings will need to be mobile compatible as audiences connect remotely from their phones even more than ever before.
- 5. Employee wellbeing** - The pandemic has increased the trend of employers playing an expanded role in their employees' financial, physical and mental well-being. Personal factors rather than external factors will take precedence over what matters for organisations and employees alike.

As we talk through the future, the majority of associations today depend on meetings and events as their primary source of revenue or, in some cases, the sole driver to keep them afloat. And with these activities being the first to get impacted, associations will need to re-think, re-strategise and put a whole new context to make this work for them and their communities. So whilst in the past the number one reason for audiences to be at events was networking, the current world of digital meetings not only impacts the experience but even affect the priorities as they will change for everyone.

More so, when life starts coming back

to normal, meetings and events will surely jump back to face-to-face interactions but with a long-lasting impact of audiences wanting to still be connected digitally. Whilst hybrid events have been in existence for some years, it is now more than ever that they will be tested and become a key ingredient in the planning of future events.

So, what does this mean for us as event organisers? Well, on one side there will be some impact on physical attendance but then it also opens a whole new audience outreach in different parts of the world. In the last three months, we have seen many associations comment on virtual events being larger than expected and that they are attracting audiences they never connected with in the past. There are a whole lot of new members who demand quality, content and the ability to connect without the hassle of moving from the comfort of their offices.

Associations will, however, need to think harder on engagement as to how they can keep audiences active in front of screens for longer hours as well as condensing their content to ensure they remain connected and relevant to their community. The reality is that change is now, the future is here and you have very few options, but to adapt to the new paradigm.

The key areas of focus for associations will include:

1. **Globalised content** – associations can look to produce content relevant to more than one region or country, resulting in more audiences

drawn from all around the globe.

2. **Marketing on a global scale** – associations will need to get more aggressive with their marketing campaigns and use digital tools and social media to get the best outreach.
3. **Business models** – It will be easier to push digital products but on the other hand the charges will need to be less for audiences, especially to those in low income countries.
4. **Engagement** – Relying on bite size information, interviews with speakers, key highlights of content and other small pieces of information prior to the event and a whole new set of engagement actions such as interactions through polls, quizzes and other social media activations during the event.

As we saw with post 9/11, the impact of COVID-19 will come with both short and long term changes, in how we interact and offer products to our members. Associations will need to remain agile to quickly adapt and deal with uncertainty, since changes in demand will be influenced by economic fluctuations.



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This article was provided by the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers, which represents today 139 companies comprised of over 9,900 professional congress organisers, meeting planners and managers of international and national congresses, conventions and special events from 40 countries. Article Author Ajay Bhojwani, is Managing Director, MCI Middle East. MCI is an independent, privately held company, with headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, with 64 offices in over 32 countries across Europe, the Americas, Asia-Pacific, India, the Middle East and Africa delivering projects for clients all over the world.



From the Challenges of the Pandemic Comes **a New Wave of Innovation**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

Since the pandemic started in March of 2020, everyone in the association, travel, meetings and hospitality sectors has been challenged in ways that none of us could have imagined. In addition to the need to regroup, retool and rethink about virtually every aspect of our businesses or organisations, we've had to do it in an incredibly short period of time. Some of us are still in the throes of trying to deal with the impact of COVID-19, some have, unfortunately, lost the battle already - others are just trying to outlast it.

Yet, there are some who have already decided that this crisis has created a permanent change in the way their organisation must operate if it is to not only regain its pre-virus position but to exceed it. These are the organisations who have committed to new, innovative ways of doing things and these are the organisations that will thrive in the post-virus world.

Just look at the activities of a typical membership-based organisation that have been (or threaten to be) drastically changed in 2020:

- meetings
- member retention
- member engagement
- trade shows
- educational offerings
- human resources (layoffs, remote workers, productivity, etc)

These are just the operational aspects of the organisation itself. It doesn't even begin to consider the impact on the industries, professions and communities served by the Association. In this environment, innovation and the advanced use of technology are the tools by which organisations can emerge as leaders going forward.

Here are some things that are already starting to create a picture of our future world and what organisations need to do to take advantage of these trends.

'Zoom' is not the answer, but it is a tool for getting to the next level.

That is not meant to be an advertisement for the Zoom online meeting platform. In the USA, it has become the most widely used video conferencing format by far. It is so popular that many are already complaining of 'Zoom fatigue' because there are still very few in-person meetings or events being held at the levels they were before the COVID-19 crisis. Regardless of which technology is used for these virtual meetings and conferences, the implications for the future have become clearer.

1. They have probably saved a lot of organisations from being in even worse shape than they would have been in were it not for this option. Face-to-face (if not actually in-person) is still better than telephone conference calls for communications, engagement, networking and presentations.

2. People (members, exhibitors, vendors, salespeople, etc.) are getting used to doing business and/or participating this way. Some form of virtual interaction is going to be expected as an option for many activities from now on.
3. All organisations must commit time and resources to training their staffs and key leaders to be effective virtual communicators.
4. Since these virtual activities have become so commonplace, the only way to differentiate yourself in this area is through quality control. Be the best, easiest, and most enjoyable presenter of virtual content in your field.

Outcomes vs processes; experiences vs events

One of our biggest fears is that members, customers, exhibitors and other stakeholders will get so used to doing things virtually that we will see a big drop-off in attendance in meetings and conferences after the pandemic subsides. This may well be the case, but to minimise the impact, use technology and innovation to enhance your value proposition to members and attendees.

1. **Upgrade your content through technology.** There may be ways to use a virtual option to attract a higher level of technical speaker, public official, or celebrity to participate in your event due to no travel, etc.

2. **Increase networking through innovation.** One of the things people miss the most right now is the ability to make new friends, acquaintances and business contacts in-person. The old-fashioned receptions and physical contact such as handshaking may be absent for quite a while. Help attendees find new ways to greet each other, to create 'meetup' types of gatherings within your event and to be able to interact with the organisation's leadership.
3. **Combine the traditional with the innovative.** Experiment with combinations of in-person and virtual formats for educational programs, social events, members-only activities and trade shows. Ask your partners (exhibitors, associate members, host venues, etc.) to work with you to increase the impact of the attendee experience.

Innovation and technology don't just give us the opportunity to do different things and to do things differently. They also give us the opportunity to do things better. In the post-COVID-19 world, that may well be your biggest competitive advantage.

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