

# Headquarters

FEBRUARY 2021 #98 BUILDING BRIDGES IN THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY



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# The **Revolution** Will be **Digitalised!**

If several attempts had already been outlined in 2020, Convening Leaders 2021 was superior in bringing all of them together, with intersections of connectivity for a **MICE revolution**. It was quite clear that regardless of the nostalgia for the past or even the bliss of a pandemic-free world, the **conference of the future** will no longer be limited to a ballroom or an in-person conversation.

Confused? Ask the good people at the **German Convention Bureau** who developed the “Future Meeting Space” project, to envision how people will meet in the future. The hybrid element was the key that opened many unknown doors, however, there are certainly several improvements to be made. As **Paul Tambyah** says in our pages, people attend international meetings to “network and interact”. The question will be how to make these multilayered experiments more efficient from an interaction point of view.

Let's not forget the inclusion of the **tech expert** in your team. It will be the benchmark for any service package or marketing campaign. “The truth is that no company can survive without a technologist on its team,” tells us **Ayesha Khanna** in our interview.

For destinations, this new quid pro quo will be as drastic as it is vital for their market share. In a not-too-distant future, a city may be **sharing a conference venue** with three others around the globe, while **broadcasting** a completely different convention from its studios or displaying a **simulation** of a trade

show at its convention centre.

Another major issue for buyers will be the **bottom line** of the event. Yes, technology is here but it is not free of charge. With so many software apps, event platforms and parallel investments, organisers will have to be strict with their balance sheets so as not to compromise their **budgeting**.

We all know that the industry is both fascinated and frightened by this huge leap. After all, it is a natural reaction. So, just as vigorously as we are dealing with this pandemic, it is time to **embrace change** with the same conviction. This “**Smart Meetings Industry**” won't happen overnight... but it's just around the corner!

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# Welcome to a New Cooperative World!



2021 is a year in which the surprise factor is giving way to a constant readjustment of tested models and new ventures. Associations and event professionals cannot afford to deliver another year on a plate, and today we can already see multiple on-screen activities, digital marketing promotions and regional hubs for broadcasting events.

And while vaccination begins to be administered in several countries, different timelines of distribution and the emergence of new strains are preventing large-scale immunisation from increasing. This also means postponing in-person gatherings and rescheduling trade shows and annual meetings for the near future. That's what happened to AIME Melbourne or IMEX Frankfurt, just to name a few.

**Tedros Adhanom**, director-general of the **World Health Organization (WHO)** said a few weeks ago that "it is not time for any country to slow down measures" to control the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the global reduction in infections and deaths. WHO also recognised that understanding the true origin of the new coronavirus and how it was able to generate this pandemic will be a "complex and time-consuming" process.

Clearly, associations are impatient. A new survey from the **Global Network of Director Institutes** puts some perspective on the numbers, showing that boards are busier than ever now, but working from a distance has created new pressure to make all of that effort work. Predictably, the report also implies that future board meetings may need to be more bite-sized "to take advantage of the unique benefits that virtual meetings may offer". In MICE, desperate times call for resilient measures.

This *HQ* edition is going to give our readers a taste of a perhaps quieter, but definitely no

less stimulating future. Looking forward, collaboration is not going to be the only 'natural' attitude. As **Mark Levin's** article points out, moving from competition to **coopetition** should also come 'naturally' to associations – especially when licking your wounds. That is, **partnerships for growth.**

Special circumstances forced everybody to stop and look for advice, like the 21 tips we focused on in our last issue. So here's a new one for you: if collaborating with your competitors doesn't make sense to you even if you have something to learn from each other, engaging in a partnership may be the option you are looking for.

In this issue, you can still keep up with our **Coronavirus sector** among several associations and destination reports; our special feature on "**Convening Leaders 2021**" with some exciting on-site interviews; the **online fam trip** we took to Japan and our usual *HQ Essential* on the value of coopetition.

At the end of the day, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts!





## Coopetition: With a Little Help From My 'Frenemies'

As a global community, the **International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA)** has a database of 21,000 regularly occurring meeting series, 260,000 meeting editions and 12,000 international associations. Clearly, some rivalry must exist both among destinations and among the people who want to organise their events in the exact same places.

Rivalry is natural in business and its opposite, collaboration, is too hard while competing for the same targets. Sometimes, however, it has turned out to be a winning strategy. The pandemic is definitely one of those times, and a few smart visionaries realised that immediately. Last May, the **organisation for association management ASAE**, significantly hosted a special webinar on 'Global partnerships in the COVID-19 era'.

"The COVID-19 outbreak has radically transformed associations around the world," they wrote. "With cancelled global congresses and unprecedented government interventions, associations are facing extraordinary challenges ranging from disrupted global operations and strained budgets to rapidly accelerated digital transformations and new ways of working."

"At the same time, members have never needed their associations more. That's why associations across the globe are thinking of new ways to partner and strategise with vendors, suppliers, destinations, and each other to support and engage

their members, stakeholders, and the public-at-large during these challenging times. To be successful, association leaders need an expansive partnership mindset to find opportunities amidst the chaos and add value going forward".

The terminology "coopetition" came to the business world in 1992 coined by **Raymond Noorda**, CEO of **Novell**. In 1995, **Adam M. Brandenburger** and **Barry J. Nalebuff** developed academic work that introduced coopetition as a revolutionary mindset that combines cooperation and competition. A relationship in which competing firms first cooperate with each other to jointly create value and a bigger market, and then individually compete for the created value. From that point until reaching the MICE industry it was just a jump forward, driven by the acceleration of this crisis and a new status quo.

Just take the coopetition partnership carried out between the promoting agencies of **Barcelona** and **Vienna**: both convention bureaus have the same role, but that has not prevented a joint approach to several associations in order to present their bids for mutual benefits. Take also the **Berlin MICE Summit 2018** with the motto "Coopetition to shape the future". In a prophetic meeting that foresaw the breakthrough of hybrid events, new design thinking and circular economies, more than 300 event professionals imagined a future in which the 'neighbour next door' could be our strategic partner to develop appropriate creative solutions – from sustainable

catering to waste prevention at events and emergency management for evacuating large venues.

In yet another case, the **American Outdoor Industry Association (OIA)** launched a campaign entitled “Together We Are a Force,” representing different parts of the outdoor industry and emphasising the work they do together, namely OIA executives, major industry leaders, but also manufacturers, small retailers and nonprofits. Even more recently, a group of English Core Cities has joined forces to create the **Hybrid Events Solutions UK**; a free initiative open to all business audiences, to support the conference and event industry as it continues to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic.

Featured in this edition we can find two good examples of this ambivalent relationship of competitive collaboration: the hybrid meeting, **Convening Leaders 2021** and the online fam trip, **Meet Japan**. In both cases, the organisations that oversaw the events resorted to online management platforms but did not abandon long-standing PCOs in sharing experiences and in the physical setting up of their hubs. In Singapore, **PCMA** turned the page on a new hybrid cycle with **JUNO**'s conference streaming worldwide, but it also needed assistance from local partners to install its global broadcast centre. In our virtual visit to Japan, the software provider, **Cvent**, made possible the digital meeting between all buyers but also served as an umbrella for the promotion of their physical rivals, **Kenex** and **International Conference Services (ICS)**.

This is where the concept of ‘coopetition’ lies. Associations’ members, destinations representatives and other stakeholders can all use, as the Beatles suggested, a little help from their ‘friends’. Business

is both competition and cooperation. The future will reveal that these antagonists will ultimately be complementary pieces in a well-oiled event machine.

This was - and it probably has always been - particularly true in the world of science. “Some problems are too big, too complex and the humanitarian need too great to address alone,” wrote **Nathalie Moll** of the **European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA)**. “And, when time is of the essence, pooling knowledge and specialist skills is vital to success.” At the same time, managing the relationship between NGOs, donors and for-profit organisations is a very important aspect to retain through various levels of cooperation. The benefits expressed for NGOs can be an incentive for them to work together in managing crises effectively, and to form a playbook to act within their ecosystem.

In the year of recovery, we may have the chance to see a small tourism association partnering with a student exchange programme in response to the COVID-19 crisis. We may see event professionals sharing their knowledge with their peers around the world. We may see governments creating funds for stakeholders and event organisers. Destinations investing in digitalisation within a network of local actors. **Sustainable development** becoming a magic word. Universities and academic experts informing policy and government-level decisions.

All eyes are on rivals to put differences apart and make the best of what they have in common. Keep your ‘friends’ close but your ‘enemies’ closer!



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# The Sound of **Silence**

Concert halls, theatres and universities' corridors have never been so quiet. Associations dealing with live events and academic mobility were not euphemistic when describing this crisis in the cultural sector. It was bad and it is not over yet! For this edition, *HQ* sought to understand the tribulations experienced by some European associations, the support they have received and the new objectives for 2021. Give the floor to the connoisseurs...

1. **One year into the pandemic, what impacts has it had on your sector?**
2. **What kind of support or cooperation have you tried to develop in order to survive in these difficult circumstances?**
3. **What do you think 2021 holds for your association and sector?**

## EUROPEAN THEATRE CONVENTION (ETC),

BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, *HEIDI WILEY.*



**1** To put it bluntly: the impact on the theatre sector has been catastrophic. The cultural and creative industry is the worst-hit sector in Europe alongside air travel. Theatres in many countries are closed, with their staff on furlough. There are real concerns about people leaving the industry, especially those who already struggle to access roles in the sector.

With so many theatres closed, there is a 'production jam' effect. Shows have been postponed after they were produced. When theatres open again, there will be fewer opportunities for the next generation of artists.

Nonetheless, we and our member theatres have adapted well. We transitioned to online events and became skilled at livestreaming our activities. Our political activity and lobbying have become more effective. With other European networks we have collectively stressed that the performing arts are not simply entertainment, but are fundamental for healthy democratic societies.

**2** We are grateful that the EU has increased funding for Creative Europe by €600 million, up to a total of €2.2 billion.

We are happy to see that the EU is taking the situation very seriously. It is in constant dialogue with us to understand the challenges the sector faces. In November 2020, at the first **European Theatre Forum**

we organised, the European Commission launched the **European Theatre Initiative**, a genuine new instrument to lobby for the arts in Europe, to support theatres in the dreadful times of the pandemic.

The programme of the Forum was developed in partnership with 11 other European performing arts networks. This was the first time our various organisations came together to collaborate. Together we created policy recommendations for the sector with a strategic action plan, known as the **Dresden Declaration**.

**3** 2020 threatened the very foundations of the creative sector and sent shockwaves that risk undermining the progress made on diversifying our staff and our stages. These shockwaves will continue to affect us in the years to come.

2021 is the year the European Union decides on funding for the next four years, so we must work out how to continue international collaboration in theatre. As a European network and association, we will set plans for the next decade, taking on board the lessons learned and the challenges that remain with us like the climate crisis, the transition to digital and the necessity to move towards a more socially inclusive society.

We will do all we can to help our members make this time count.





## EUROPEAN LIVE MUSIC ASSOCIATION (ELMA),

BY THE PRESIDENT, *VINCENZO SPERA.*

**1** The pandemic has had devastating effects on the live music sector, with an evident drop in turnover of around 95%. Suffice it to say that, according to a recent study conducted by Ernst & Young, the total turnover of cultural and creative industries in the EU fell to €444 billion in 2020, registering a sharp drop of €199 billion compared to the previous year.

**2** The European Union and the Culture Commission have made some contributions in terms of layoffs and indicated to member states how to use public funds for culture. Other proceedings have been prepared by individual states, with – depending on the country – non-repayable loans and guarantees for the current

year, in the eventuality that the season will not take place. In general, we have maintained closer coordination and tried to bring individual governments back to common action.

**3** The association's line is to continue to put pressure on the member states and the European Union so that the funds made available are used in a way more appropriate to a post-pandemic period like the one we are experiencing. Above all we work on designing ideas that have a medium-long-term vision, also because it will take a few years to completely get out of this crisis.



[ELMNET.ORG](http://ELMNET.ORG)



## ASSOCIATION DES ÉTATS GÉNÉRAUX DES ÉTUDIANTS DE L'EUROPE (AEGEE),

BY THE PRESIDENT, *DIEDERIK DE WIT.*

**1** AEGEE-Europe is mostly focused on intercultural communication and exchanges between young people based on physical events, trainings and travelling. Now, we have a lack of live events, practically no travelling, difficulty with member recruitment, and financial struggles common to most youth organisations. This made us focus on a smooth and efficient transition from physical to virtual, as well as on raising awareness of mental health among youth. We had several successful online general assemblies, adapted our projects, supported our local organisations with online exchanges, and helped them in their development. The COVID-19 crisis showed us the importance of still being connected and emphasised our vision of a borderless Europe.

**2** With the already ongoing projects, we adapted to have online events. We were successful in finding new partners who are added to our pool of policy and advocacy, project, and knowledge experience

partnerships. Sharing best practices on how to survive is one of the best ways to improve the organisation and save the bonds between each other.

**3** 2021 holds a lot of challenges for us, especially in terms of human resources management. A lot of work is being stopped because we had physical events and projects, but that also gives us an opportunity to spend time on our internal improvements to adjust to this crisis and possible future crises. We have to keep our members motivated and give them opportunities to work in this 'new normal'. Our goals will continue to be supporting our member organisations in the smooth transition from physical to virtual to hopefully physical again, in finding new creative ideas, changing perspectives on how to recruit new members, and help with their local and European projects.



[AEGEE.ORG](http://AEGEE.ORG)



# Azerbaijan: the Long-Awaited Reunion in the Caucasus

There's a great purpose to leverage growth and high profile travelling in Azerbaijan these days. The diversity of the country allows to offer something for everyone with an open outlook, making business visitors feel always welcome here.

When it comes to the tourism and business events industries, the **State Tourism Agency** and **Azerbaijan Tourism Board** have been working actively to help local partners, through meetings, support packages and subsidised interest rates. "It is indeed true that one of our long-term goals is to make Azerbaijan one of the most prominent business event destinations globally," says the director of **Azerbaijan Convention Bureau (AzCB)**, **Sevda Aliyeva** (photo). AzCB has been taking the necessary measures to make this vision come true under ATB since 2018, and before starting to promote the country, they already took great advantage of the high-level infrastructure, strategic position and having a successful past of hosting large-scale cultural and sports events such as the Eurovision Song Contest, 1<sup>st</sup> European Games, Formula 1 Azerbaijan Grand Prix, among others. "Through all the work done over the past few years, I can proudly say that we have attracted a significant number of business events as well. Among them the International Astronautical Congress, planned for 2023 with almost 6000 delegates stands out," says Aliyeva.

By connecting with partners via numerous webinars and virtual events, ATB also came up with digitally innovative solutions. "One of them was an e-learning platform, the **Azerbaijan 101**, designed

to help partners around the world gain knowledge about Azerbaijan as a leisure and business events destination and all the related products it has to offer, along with virtual tours and inspections of Baku." The team also sponsored a global virtual hackathon, **Hack COVID-19**, to seek technological solutions to the pandemic. They expect domestic and regional events to restart soon and international ones to follow in the next few months. "We have developed the SAHMAN (**Sanitation and Hygiene Methods and Norms**) programme to raise health and safety standards focusing on accommodations, F&B and transportation providers. And up until now more than 9000 monitoring sessions have been held and it is great to see the all partners involved to make the destination safe." In this sense, Azerbaijan has a couple of priorities under its belt: keep the conversation flowing both with local and international partners, maintain the destination marketing activities and collaborations with selected media partners, and to focus on unique selling propositions especially for both corporate and association business events.

Azerbaijan Tourism Board is currently working on a series of **virtual salons** inviting audiences to learn more about the history, culture, society, arts and diplomatic relations of Azerbaijan. "Thanks to the country's location at the intersection



of East and West, we are not just limited to a modern lifestyle with a rich historical and cultural background but we also have a culture of tolerance brought by diverse beliefs of our population," Aliyeva says. "When we say smart meetings, I think of two aspects: content and technology-driven gatherings. I firmly believe that if we want to get back to physical meetings, we must admit that events should have a stronger purpose to make people travel."

By making sure that events were postponed rather than cancelled, **Baku Convention Centre** was able to mitigate the business slowdown and managed to keep more than 80% of them in 2020.

Sustainable meetings? "Azerbaijan has all the necessary features to become a more sustainable destination in the post-COVID era. Currently, both ATB and AzCB teams are working on how to best use these features by developing sustainable products for both tourism and business events industries," Aliyeva concludes.

# Vienna: The 'Waltz' Must Go On

**Vienna Convention Bureau (VCB)** is granting support for congresses hosted by associations all year long. The city is ready to promote physical meetings and bolster news solutions for industry partners.

Even when COVID-19 was making its first appearances, several destinations around the world already feared what could happen next. For Vienna, the second-largest German-speaking city in the world and home to several international organisations, suspending its MICE activity was no easy task. In times that seem distant, Vienna's meeting industry generated an added value of approximately €1 billion and about 10% of the total number of overnight stays. Ranking both number 1 in quality of life by **Mercer** in 2019 and in the **Smart City Index 2019**, the "city of music and dreams" yet saw its **Visitor Economy Strategy 2025** curbed. "Due to the cancellation of events, we are currently losing a monthly added value of about €80 million and about €22 million in tax revenues. Vienna's hotel industry is losing about 120,000 overnight stays per month," the director of Vienna Convention Bureau (VCB), **Christian Woronka** (photo), tells us.

Together with the **Vienna Tourist Board**, **Vienna's Economic Chamber** created the **Safe Stay Label** to support accommodation providers in upholding stringent **safety** and **quality standards**. "Anyone planning an event in Vienna in 2021 and

2022 will have government protection," Woronka explains. "Under the approved €300 million protective shield, the Austrian government will cover financial damage resulting from events being cancelled or restricted due to COVID-19." Applications can already be submitted via the **Austrian Hotel** and **Tourism Bank** until the 15<sup>th</sup> of June.

Organisers from abroad can also apply for grants to hold an event in Austria. "Further crucial support to the industry includes a €15 million hotel funding initiative granted by the City of Vienna through the Vienna Business Agency," adds Woronka. "Our teams, in close cooperation with our local industry partners, have successfully continued their event acquisition activity for 2022 onward."

VCB's mission is to provide customers and partners with all the necessary information, in addition to strive for an even closer networking between science and the business sector. One of the latest achievements was the **European Forum for Industrial Biotechnology and Bioeconomy 2021**, attracting industry leaders and policy experts to discuss opportunities and challenges for transformative technologies. "Exciting



technologies are being developed and implemented in Vienna that help to connect the physical and virtual space."

In the meantime, the city is renewing itself with the construction of a **new event building** (Ariana), the reopening of **Hilton Vienna Park** (Austria's biggest congress hotel) and a modern broadcast studio and Wi-Fi 6 at **Messe Wien**. "During the hardest time of the crisis Vienna's event centres had taken over an extremely crucial role – they provided much needed space for public COVID-19 mass testing and alternative hospitalisation," concludes Woronka. For travelling environmentally friendly, the Visitor Economy Strategy 2025 requires a dedicated focus on green issues, including a growing number of eco-certified local businesses and ambitious targets.



## What Happens in **Vegas**, Goes **Beyond its Borders**

Surrounded by mountain ranges in the Mojave Desert, there's a city that reigns supreme in the business events industry. The message from Las Vegas is: "Kiss off 2020, kick it to the curb and look to the future."

**F**amous for its mega casino-hotels and associated activities, Las Vegas is a top three destination in the USA for business conventions and a global leader in the hospitality industry. Home to **IMEX America** and countless trade shows, the city attracts more than 6.5 million business delegates each year with a remarkable approval rate. This was until the world collapsed with the motto "stay home" that made Vegas rethink its entire strategy. Some casualties reflect the momentum of major events moving to the virtual side, such as the **CES Annual Trade Show** or the **NFL Draft 2020**. "I think by the time we get to March, vaccines will start to roll out at scale and that will make a big difference," says **Steve Hill**, CEO of **Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA)**.

It is expected that, as Las Vegas advances in the second quarter of this year, people will feel more confident, health numbers will improve considerably and travel sentiment will follow a positive trajectory. The data emerges from a new study

conducted by **Heart+Mind Strategies**. Of all respondents, 91% said they miss face-to-face interaction at conferences and conventions, while 58% said they feel burnt out from virtual business meetings. Among business travellers, 77% would prefer attending business conferences, conventions and trade shows in-person.

"We are still a top destination to our customers from a comfort standpoint in health and safety aspects," Hill says. Even with strict measures in place, there was an increase of about 24% in the intention to leisure travel to Las Vegas in the following six months. In the meantime, Vegas' offer is keeping a balance with health and safety protocols. Especially as 74% of people surveyed believe that Las Vegas is better prepared to safely host in-person conferences for the remaining of the year. According to Hill, "large-scale testing and even access passes are very hard to implement, so our focus is more on herd immunisation and the rapid spread of the vaccine". The mindset of LVCVA is to use its meetings, legacy and signature

events to lead the country's recovery in the post-pandemic stage.

In fact, the study backs up Las Vegas as the top destination in the country compared to other markets. Why? The quality of the business experience, with most attendees believing that Vegas lends itself to innovation, easy transportation and good logistics, helps explain the success. Another strong suit is the fact that rotating meetings and conventions held in the city experience an 8% higher turnout than any other in the US. "The major trade shows are committed to come back, as well as some associations and event organisers," says Hill. And, on hybrid events, he adds: "We are in the business of creating content and limiting that content to only those who can come in person, it is a missed opportunity".

Meanwhile, new developments in the city are underway with a new stadium, expansions in the **Las Vegas Convention Centre** and construction of new resorts. Vegas means business!

## Seoul: One Step at a Time

One of the frontrunners of corporate events and conferences in Asia, Seoul rolled out a new PLUS SEOUL programme to further help the industry recover to pre-COVID-19 levels.



As many other global MICE destinations, Seoul had a challenging year with few expected events – even though they were hosted successfully under strict quarantine measures after the initial wave of the outbreak had passed. Just a few months later, the industry faced yet another interruption of offline events due to the second upsurge in infected cases. Then, the rise of online solutions has seen a transformation of many delayed events into an online or hybrid format.

“There is also an acceleration of meetings technology within the industry from existing companies implementing such services, as well as start-ups coming up with innovative solutions,” says **Jihyun Kim** (photo), director at **Seoul Convention Bureau (SCB)**.

Under the topic ‘Exploring ways for the MICE industry to move forward in the COVID-19 era’, **Seoul MICE ON** took place last November to lend a hand on this pressing conversation. Collaboration with **Seoul MICE Alliance (SMA)** is a big part of withstanding the ecosystem of Seoul’s MICE industry, as Kim states: “SCB organised a campaign titled ‘**Stand Strong Together**’ with SMA members, to boost

positive atmosphere and resilience and continued this cooperation in a following campaign by promoting unique venues to our residents.”

In Seoul, the size of on-site meetings shrank following the quarantine measures guideline released from the central government. SCB is providing support for on-site and online events with disinfection services, provision of basic PPE materials, and loan of thermal imaging cameras. “Hybrid events are to receive financial support and even the **Seoul MICE World**, which is a virtual booth to experience the cultural atmosphere of online Seoul,” Kim adds.

The global MICE industry needs more time until borders are fully reopened and large-scale MICE events get back on track. Thus, the focal point of the SCB’s work is still the vitality and presence of the **Seoul MICE ecosystem**. “Most of our initiatives are organised around this network to ensure faster recovery,” Kim tells us. “We are producing 360 VR videos to promote venues and services and developing a virtual team-building programme to attract future visitors to Seoul.”

Convention centres have taken the past year as a period to equip themselves with advanced technologies, in preparation for the new virtual era. In particular, **COEX**, Seoul’s largest venue, played a leading role by setting up a strategic partnership with **NexTech AR**, a Canadian technology provider company, and changed the face of its MICE events by taking on virtual AR. According to the local bureau, digital transformation has existed for some time and the pandemic only served as an accelerator for this change. This was the backdrop for a new virtual platform that depicts the facilities and leading sites of the Seoul convention tour, adding up another tool to their virtual portfolio. “We also want to invest in building databases of local associations that can connect with international ones for future events, as well as local companies for potential business opportunities,” Kim says.

As the **Seoul Tourism Organization** is dedicated to building a tourism ecosystem with city residents, SCB will follow a sustainable pathway to create synergies with other players in the MICE industry. A breath of trust and hope from the capital of South Korea, Seoul.



# Online Meet Japan 2021: *Konnichiwa* to Future Conferences

The pandemic is still showing no signs of slowing down, so destinations must keep their business efforts and come up with new ideas. By this token, **Japan Convention Bureau** has chosen to turn this MICE dialogue into a digital platform with its partners and clients: the “Online Meet Japan, Edu. Fam 2021.”



**T**raveling across the world is a task within the reach of few these days. **On-site inspections** and **interactive workshops** are just two sampling activities that have had to be converted to digital as a useful destination marketing tools. That’s what **Japan National Tourism Organization** did with this “Online Meet Japan, Edu Fam”, an annual hosted buyers program that highlighted the convention scene of the “Land of the Rising Sun”. Japan with its indelible reputation and network of services is a natural choice for holding international conferences, and this programme also served as the first step towards on-site hosted visits with association representatives and core PCOs/meeting planners.

## Online Seminar for Buyers

At the Buyers seminar, two high-profile executives from **IAPCO** were invited to present their experiences as conference organisers in the country: **Mathias Posch**, Chairman & Partner at **ICS**, and **Ori Lahav**, Vice President of Client & Operations at **Kenes Group**. Posch took the lead with his case study on the assembly process of the **18th International Association for the Study of Lung Cancer (IASLC)** conference in Yokohama, in 2017. He carefully elaborated on the decision to choose Japan as a host, listing its clear advantages ranging from its meeting design to its challenges and remarkable results. Meanwhile, Ori Lahav followed with his

three flagship projects both in Tokyo and Kyoto: the **2016 annual meeting of the International Continence Society**, the **World Congress of Neurology 2017** and the **2018 International Gynecologic Society** meeting. In all cases, the collaborative models with local associations and the 360° approach between DMCs, CVBs, venues and MICE agents proved to be essential for the final outcomes. **Cultural differences** were also one of the aspects that PCOs faced, but thanks to active cooperation of local bureaus, they ended up becoming an attractive plus, instead of a major stumbling. Ultimately, event scores reached superb levels for Kenes: participation of more than 2000 delegates with a strong support from the Asia

Pacific region, significant profit margins, and a high-quality experience according to the surveys carried out. But let's not stop here, come to meet two Japanese cities that aspire to new heights in 2021...

### Yokohama

A lively and growing modern city, Yokohama offers a wide range of options for any conference organiser, from **Pacifico Yokohama** – one of the largest convention complexes in the world – to a diverse array of convention facilities, comprised of art museums, theatres and meeting venues. The city has been welcoming international visitors for a long time and lives up to its cosmopolitan status, with an incredible fusion of cultures and a commercial exchange that owes much to its port opened in the 19th century. Yokohama can be reached just 30 minutes from **Haneda**, Tokyo's international airport, and 90 minutes from **Narita International Airport**. Getting back to the "Pacifico", this world-class convention centre manages to gather 5,000 seats in the convention hall, 50 meeting rooms in its conference centre, 20,000 m<sup>2</sup> in its exhibition hall, a newly-opened "North" multipurpose hall...and the icing on the cake: the **InterContinental Yokohama Grand**, a five-star hotel directly connected to the convention centre so that your delegates don't have to rush for their appointments. Sustainability is also one of the core values of this city with initiatives in rainwater recovery, waste recycling, green rooftops and certified food. Just a few minutes walking from Rinko Park, we can find another hotel to accommodate your group: the **Kahala Hotel & Resort Yokohama**, a timeless wonder with a relaxed Hawaiian concept to pamper your guests. Complementary sites such as the **Sankeien Garden** with capacity for up to 50 VIP guests or the Yokohama Red Brick Warehouse, used as an outdoor event space, can perfectly add a local touch to your business meeting. Don't forget to visit stunning **Chinatown** to whet your appetite or stop by Noge, the riverside nightlife hub of Yokohama.

### Osaka

This urban colossus was traditionally considered Japan's economic hub, turning out to be a major financial centre in the likes of Tokyo. Osaka has always been a strategic place for international trade, science and cultural exchange, remaining a focal point for many companies, universities and research institutes in Western Japan. This bustling area is only one hour away by car, or train from **Kansai International airport**. In Nakanoshima, the city's political and financial heart, we stopped at the first station of this MICE journey: **Osaka International Convention Centre**. One of the best equipped spaces in Japan, Osaka ICC boasts to accommodate all types of events for all sizes, up to 10,000 people. The building consists of 28 meeting rooms, including the main hall – which can seat up to 2,745 people, an event hall and the conference hall. Side by side with the venue, we came across the **Rihga Royal Hotel Osaka** with over 1,000 guest rooms. In the Osaka bay area, we stepped into the largest exhibition centre of Western Japan, the **Intex Osaka**. With a massive

amount of floor space, this state of the art venue was host to the 2019, **G20 Osaka Summit** and has extensive experience in putting together **health and IT conferences** as well. If your entourage doesn't want to get too far from Intex, **Hyatt Regency Osaka** will be the best choice. In **Yumeshima**, site of **Expo 2025**, lies the futuristic dreams of the city under the concept of a smart resort city with meeting and event facilities. Right behind we can glimpse the sports island, **Maishima**, which as its name indicates can host sporting events, but also concerts and festivals. With a dreamlike view of the **Osaka Castle**, planners can also book the **Landmark Square Osaka** to create an intimate atmosphere for gala dinners or exclusive events. On the hotel side, we leave you with two more suggestions for your stay: the **Conrad Osaka** and **W Osaka**, scheduled to open the March 2021. Finally, if you want to enjoy your free time why not take a walk along the **Tombori River Walk** and try one of **Dōtonbori's** numerous restaurants at the historic alley of **Hozenji Yokochō**. Guess why the city is called "the nation's kitchen"?

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# PCMA Convening Leaders 2021: Carving a Hybrid Giant

From the time we stepped into the Changi airport until the time we boarded back, everyone realised that nothing could go wrong that week... or backwards. This was also the key message of **Convening Leaders**, organised by PCMA in partnership with **Singapore Tourism Board** and **Marina Bay Sands**.

*Full report and interviews by our special envoy, Manuel Fernandes.*

**P**rior clarification: as optimistic as I was about new trips and business meetings, the prospect of reaching the skies was very unlikely last December. Therefore, I was pleasantly shocked to be part of this important MICE breakthrough in Southeast Asia.

**PCMA Convening Leaders 2021** has been an all-around learning experience for event professionals and an audacious business lab for many years. After 20 editions in the United States, the **Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA)** changed the format of its annual meeting and set up its Global Broadcast Center in Singapore, from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> of January. The results were flawless. An unequivocal demonstration of competence, from operating models and health and safety protocols, to future growth plans, technology and resources. Streamed from **Sands Expo Convention Center** and with repercussions all over the world, this omnichannel experience was indeed a light at the end of the tunnel to spark economic and social recovery. Powered by **Singapore Tourism Board (STB)** and **Marina Bay Sands (MBS)**, the event was also a clear step ahead into the potential and means that the small city-state is bringing to the MICE industry, putting the world on notice.

Clearly ahead of the curve, Singapore was the perfect safeguard bubble to lead this new business

event into a fresh and innovative hybrid era. The COVID-19 mortality rate close to zero, alongside the very few infection cases, explain this success story. Testing, confinement, contact tracing, mask wearing and staff assistance were a constant during our stay, which made the week a blast in an apocalyptic world. In total, each delegate was subjected to three PCR swab tests (to enter, stay and return from the country) and two more antigen rapid tests to access the forum. Isolation at MBS, until the results arrived, was also required upon our arrival. On top of that, participants were urged to collect a **TraceTogether Token** at the airport counter, for SafeEntry check-ins and contact tracing purposes with encrypted data. Throughout our journey, life went on normally on the streets, even with the lingering respect for this microscopic enemy. Inside the **Sands Expo**, the efforts and logistics applied in organising the event made us forget the very reason why we stopped meeting abroad. For locals and visitors, this was definitely a win-win situation!

### **Innovation at our feet!**

The merger between the programmatic content by PCMA and the physical stage of MBS was undoubtedly the stand out feature of this year's Convening Leaders. A lengthy and uphill process that came to fruition in the right place at the right time. The digital gateway was the mantra for much



of the conference and the responses to these challenges were scalped up by the various presentations. The majority of the speakers were loud and clear: the disruption is on its way and all the chess pieces are moving towards a brand-new world of business and connections. Triggered by the pandemic, but with no possible retreat, this acceleration of innovation, or as the **New York Times** columnist **Thomas Friedman** said, the “explosion of creative destruction” came to restructure all levels of our social life and, therefore, our business meetings. These future standards could be seen in the state-of-the-art hybrid event broadcast studio at Sands Expo and Convention Center, fitted with an immersive backdrop capable of meeting the needs of each event. Another turning point was the addition of a panel of speakers composed of two in-person guests (**Keith Tan** and **Chan Heng Chee**), **Laura Citron** on video conference from London and **Sherrif Karamat**, PCMA’s CEO... as a live hologram. Chances are immeasurable. No wonder why Friedman said “The world is flatter than ever” - will we be able to catch up the pace of change or will we fall victim to the obsolete?

#### “Your attention to the speakers, please...”

The programme was divided into four learning

studios: seven change actions to transformation; new business model explorations; omnichannel events & experiences; and resiliency in life & work.

In the exclusive **Global Broadcast Center** of Sands Expo, we were pleased to attend a sample of the programme with main stage speakers, expert panels and face-to-face experiences.

After the opening lecture by Friedman, the aforementioned panel had the opportunity to unravel the keynote speaker’s take. Ambassador Chan Heng Chee was adamant in revealing that “technology is the enabler where our solution lies.” Keith Tan, STB’s CEO, acknowledged the role of a “standard setter and a convener to prepare for future scenarios,” while leader of **London & Partners**, Laura Citron is looking for “quality over quantity in this new world of opportunities for destinations.”

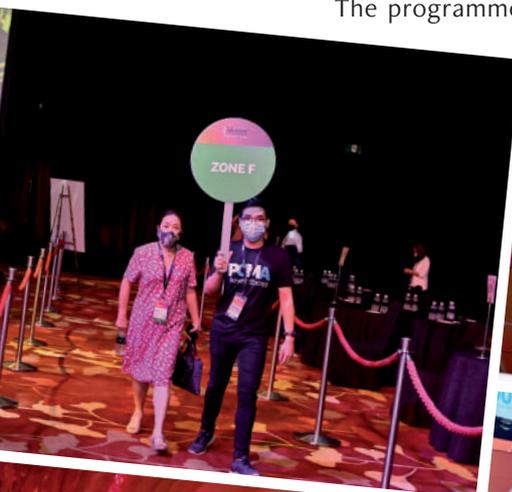
Seizing new opportunities for the **MICE Ecosystem** was another topic for the Asia Pacific panel in the discussion of new hybridised business models, emerging omnichannel events and experience trends.

The following day, physicians **Paul Tambyah** (*see the interview on page 22*) and **Peter Doherty** explained to the audience how the vaccine’s implementation could impact public health and reshape the global business event landscape.

Subsequent sessions were devoted to the future of corporate meetings and events and to the changing role of associations by two groups of in-person and on-screen experts. But what struck me the most came to light in the closing session: **Peter Hinssen**, founder of **Nexxworks**, and **Ayesha Khanna** CEO of **ADDO AI** (*read our conversation on page 24*) laid on a riveting brainstorm on radical innovation, AI and robotics, positive leadership and the impact of all things digital. “After a decade of unicorns, we are going to see a decade of phoenixes”, Hinssen said.

At least, that’s what we all expect in this industry, when the rubber hits the road.

In 2021, PCMA is also setting up the ‘**Convening EMEA**’ in Lausanne this October, an omni-channel summit bringing together event professionals and business leaders from all over the world.



# “Resilience implies steadfastness, but in **MICE** to be resilient you have to be the **opposite**.”

“(…) focus will be further technological development even when we look at this ‘Convening Leaders.’” For **Paul Town**, senior vice president at **Marina Bay Sands (MBS)**, there are no doubts whatsoever about the playbook to be implemented in this luxurious integrated resort. Strategic partner of **PCMA** and **Singapore Tourism Board (STB)** in hosting this annual meeting in Singapore, we asked Mr. Town the reason for this success, the country's place in the MICE market today and the tech wonders for its business.

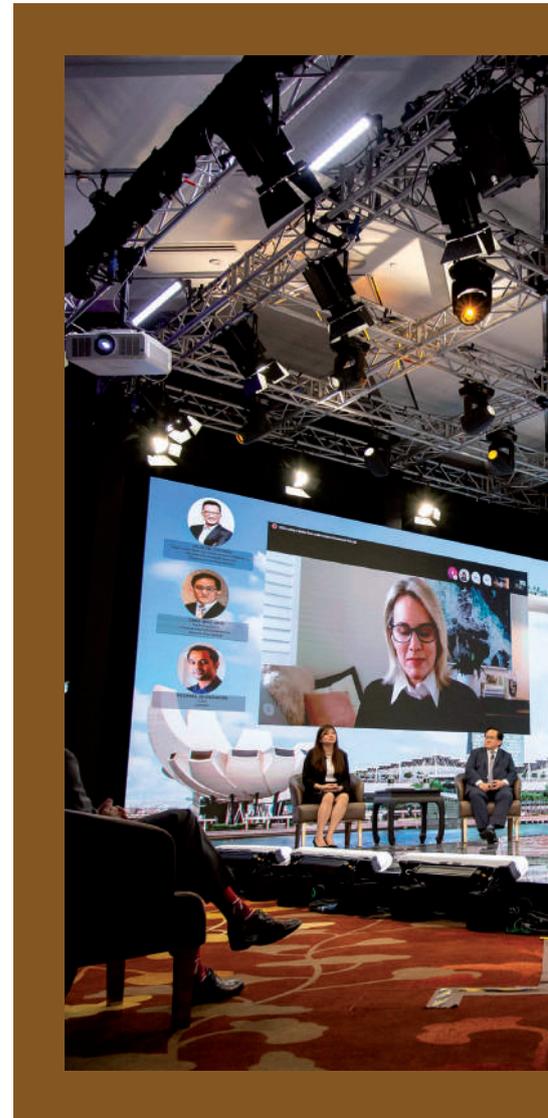
**We recently learned of the impressive 80% occupancy rate in your hotel, even with increased government restrictions and limitations. At a time of crisis in the hospitality industry, how did you manage to keep up with such high numbers?**

Once the circuit breaker ended (which was our version of the lockdown), we quickly realised that we still had a **local market** to access. Even though MBS has very much developed as a destination for overseas visitors, the local market is still important for us – it's actually our third-biggest market by engagement rate right across the property. We really had to pivot a lot of our offerings to target that local market. By positioning ourselves strongly to attract the “staycation” market, as Singaporeans were no longer allowed to travel for holidays. On the other hand, Singaporeans are great shoppers, so cross-retail has also increased, as well as Food and Beverage, since there is a great dining culture. An interesting statistic that we learnt from the STB is that Singapore is actually a huge tourism net exporter. The outbound spend of Singaporeans who travel overseas is actually \$29 billion a year. In tourism earnings, Singapore actually makes \$24 billion. The last jump on the bandwagon was MICE, because it features these corporate meetings that have been deactivated for a while. But we reimagined a way to do it

and eventually, we were able to reactivate them in this hybrid format.

**MBS launched a state-of-the-art broadcast studio at its Sands Expo CC, offering broadcast quality live-streaming capabilities and hologram functionalities. Talk me through this whole process.**

We have always been a leader in **technology-driven conferences** here, with a very strong AV team to imagine something like this. The virtual events we are holding now are not the first virtual events we ever held. However, we realise that whilst large-scale face-to-face meetings will return, this broadcast studio can play a role in the long term. Thus, we did have something planned at that point with a typical development timeline, where we were benchmarking against television stations, e-sports centres, to see what we are capable of. In the pre-pandemic, we were just pulling for an advanced version of what we're doing, with enhanced connectivity and better backdrops, but then the pandemic hit and really accelerated our thinking process. So, we probably had been thinking about it for 18 months, to put a task force together that really designed this over 3 months, and to finally build it in a week. We actually had a lot of hardware available, it was really the software and the design that allowed us to create the





PAUL TOWN

Senior Vice President of Resort Operations at Marina Bay Sands (MBS)



hybrid studio. That learning and developing are still in an accelerated phase. Whilst we delivered on something that was quite far ahead of what was originally planned, we still know there is a lot more capability in using technologies like augmented reality, mixed reality which could be delivered in a few years.

**Do you think that Singapore needs to redefine a proposition value as a MICE hub with this new hybrid factor in place?**

Yes, but not as a complete redefinition. It just becomes more part of the lead story now. The world is seeing a couple of things: one of the advantages – forget the pandemic – is being able to have a much bigger reach and potentially monetise those connections. The reason that people would travel to events and conferences before, is because they need connection with impact, they want to do **person-to-person transactions**. It's not something they thought they could do over the phone or even via screen – not enough impact nor interaction, the communication wasn't rich enough. All we know about the time of the various lockdowns in different parts of the world – when we were looking at a screen and making a zoom call – allow me to think that we had it. But when you start to get to this need to enrich content, to communicate with this impact and use backdrops like these, zoom wasn't going to cut it on its own for years to come. Hence why I think this has come to the front and why I think it has a long-term application. I hope we get back to the same face-to-face numbers that we had, but there will be many more layers of the community that we will be able to reach through this kind of technology.

**How do you expect your event planning to change in the post-pandemic phase, not only with customer service but also with new safety prevention guidelines?**

In terms of safety guidelines, I don't think they will be all sustained at the same level. There will be lingering community expectations around sanitation and cleanliness.

For example, we are currently accredited with “SG Clean” and “Bureau Veritas”, which is really an accreditation system designed specifically to measure the actions around containing, controlling and protecting against Covid-19. I think there are elements of what we did to get these accreditations to be sustained. In particular, around the sanitation of rooms, highly touched surfaces like escalators, handrails and so forth. However, we expect that at some point one will be able to have a dinner with more than 50 people and sit at a table with more than 8 people, without being separated or put into boxes. That is, the social element of the events will be broadened down. So, no, I don't think every element will remain but some core elements will.

**How important is it for you within the framework of your space, to have multipurpose workers and to diversify the qualifications of your employees?**

It has been market-driven and very important for us. We do have a much more diverse offering now. If we look at MICE specifically, the upskilling and cross-skilling of that team has been significant. For example, there is a **digital strategy accreditation** offered by PCMA for all 52 members of the AV team, who will be able to obtain it by the end of the first quarter of 2021. It might be related to the running of this facility, but it really has an impact across the board. If you look at the strongest labour deployment through MICE previously, it was quite F&B focused because it's such a labour-intensive area. Now that the high touch service element of F&B is not quite at the same level, that has been scaled back a bit. So, a lot of these team members have been cross-skilled into these tech areas. The ability to run safe events, delivers on the social distancing measures for example. And that is just MICE. We are seeing the same kind of cross-skilling requirements across the board. Some of them also come back as a result of overall reduced fall in demand, so we need to have a more flexible workforce to move around, from department to department or from restaurant to restaurant.

**We are very curious to know about the event industry resilience roadmap that you have adopted here. How is it positively affecting the work of the MBS and Sands Expo for the safe resumption of events?**

The MICE industry has always been about adaptability. It's funny because resilience implies steadfastness, but in MICE to be resilient you have to be the opposite. There are so many pivots that we have to go through to remain relevant and marketable to event planners and the MICE industry, so that resilience is born out of adaptability. That needs to be the theme ongoing. It's not just about tech – although it's a massive part of it. It's also about: has this market started to open up? As the borders open up, it's bound to be different applications for exhibitors or for delegates from different markets. How do we adapt the facilities to handle that? As we ease out of the pandemic, it is also important to be in step with the ramp up of the market and able to accommodate how quickly demand returns. Because there is certainly pent-up elements to it and we must know how to

react to that and deliver safely. These measures that we take should never be set in stone, because at some point the market will define them as too stringent or too relaxed. We need to be responsive to our market.

**How are these new sustainable policies impacting the MBS structure today?**

Sustainability has never really been a buzzword for us, it has always been at the forefront of our thinking and we definitely consider ourselves to be a leader in this area. Our parent company is listed on the **Dow Jones Sustainability Index** and we are one of the **leading sustainable MICE destinations** in the world. 20% of the events held here in the past were actually sustainable events, with the first carbon-neutral MICE event in Singapore. In 2020, everything changed. There's a lot of disposable, we saw increases in waste, but our very strong sustainability team has pivoted as well. They worked very closely in particular with our kitchen team to look at sustainable sourcing. We are at 51% of

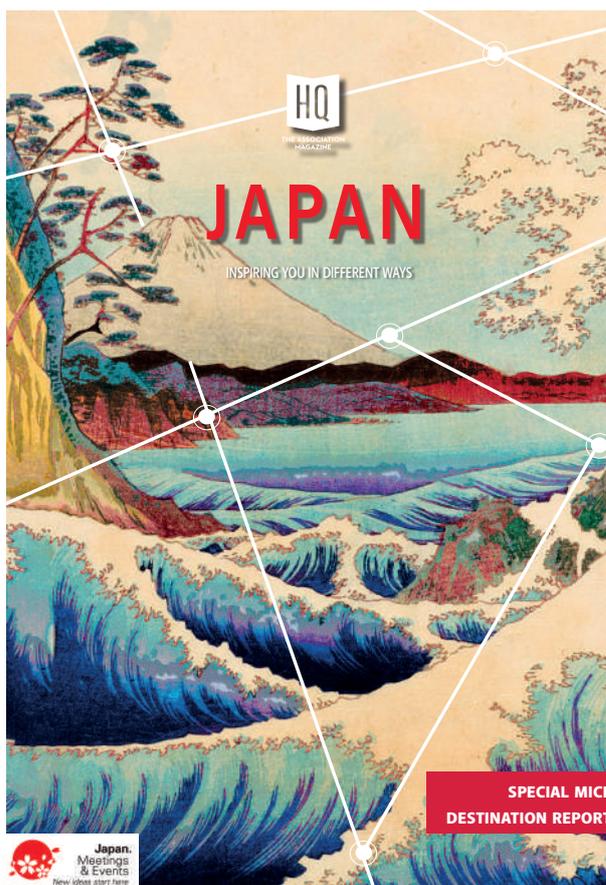
sustainable seafood sources here, we do a lot of work in managing waste, we diverted around 800,000 kilos of food waste in the last year, etc. On top of that, we have reduced our carbon footprint by 33% since 2012. That focus continues and absolutely remains a focus for us. Has it been difficult? For some specific elements of sustainability, absolutely. Look at the abandonment of disposable masks that have been processed and sanitised. Through the circuit breaker, we also developed a non-disposable MBS mask that is not disposable for sustainability reasons, provided for free to all of our team members.



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# “We will probably **never return** to what it was like in **2019**, but hopefully **we will get close.**”

After a gloomy year, the first vaccines are starting to pop up and with them a frantic race for national distribution everywhere. In the platoon of industries eager for the rapid spread of vaccination, last January PCMA Convening Leaders 2021 set the tone for a broad exposure on these findings with a panel of medical experts. We asked **Paul Tambyah**, President-Elect of the **International Society of Infectious Diseases**, how far we are from the retrieval of the business events industry.

## How do you assess the global and political reaction to the pandemic?

What surprised me positively was the way that many low and middle income countries responded to the pandemic with relatively little help from high income countries. Looking at all numbers, many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are defying predictions made early that they would be devastated on a scale similar to what happened with the West African Ebola outbreak. Indeed, the lessons learned from Ebola have translated into trained personnel and locally developed diagnostic and public health resources in the AFRO-region. These have certainly helped the continent to control the pandemic. Although it is possible that they were lucky for biological or climate reasons, we cannot take away from the hard work by African doctors and scientists. On the other side, I think that scientists collectively have failed in that there is still a lot that we do not know about the virus that we could potentially do with the right experiments or epidemiological studies. To date, I haven't seen a single case-control study to try to explain why there are super spreading events in some bars and religious gatherings and not in many other almost identical situations. I think that as a scientific community, we have neglected some of the fundamental questions which could have shaped the response for everyone.

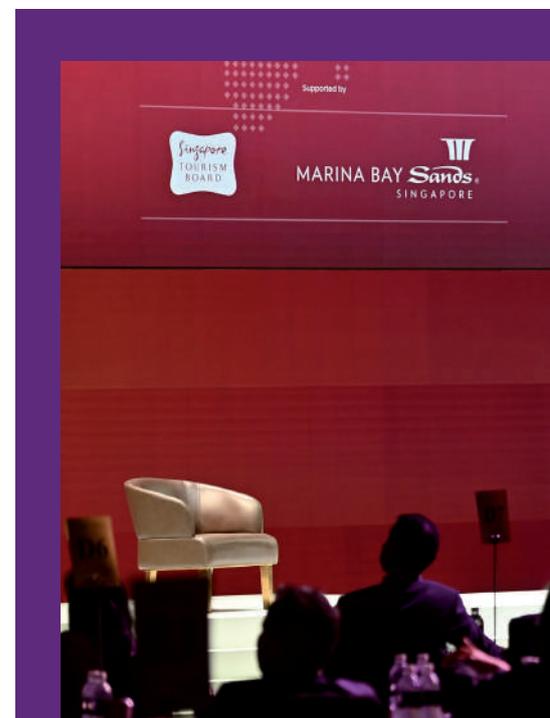
## How will medicine and science manage to contain infectious diseases in a

## hyper-connected society?

I think that the biggest difference between both H1N1 influenza pandemics (1918 and 2009) is the **power of social media** for good and for evil. The first news of this novel virus appeared on Chinese social media platforms before the official confirmation. The announcement of the genetic sequence of the virus was made on twitter and many positive findings and educational messages have gone across various social media platforms. At the same time, a lot of misinformation, scare mongering and even vilification of certain groups of people have been amplified on social media. I think that scientists and doctors, with a few notable exceptions, are not good at communicating with the public. We need to be able to respond to the questions behind public anxiety and provide accurate answers while admitting gaps in what we know. More importantly, I think that we need to admit that we were wrong when science advances and our initial hypotheses are proved inaccurate. I think that the public will accept sincerity and in general does not like being talked down to.

## How challenging is it for ISID to educate new audiences about the risks of infectious diseases within a flood of contradictory information?

It is extraordinarily challenging for ISID as our members come from across the world. We have an excellent secretariat and a new platform which allows us to **disseminate**



**accurate information online.** We have Spanish language materials and we are translating our guide to infection control into multiple other languages. However, our reach is currently a fraction of some of the world's most famous influencers or celebrities who may have some rather strange views about infectious diseases. One challenge that we really have to tackle in the coming months is to remind people that scientists can disagree in a civil way and based on evidence rather than personal and speculative. A classic example of this was the two competing polio vaccines promoted by Salk and Sabin both of which, eventually, turned out to be necessary to eradicate polio. As the pandemic begins to ease off, we really need to **objectively examine** the data and help the public draw the right lessons so we do not make the same mistakes the next time around – and there will be a next time!

### How can vaccination impact the life of associations and reshape the global business events landscape?

A number of us from the society has argued that the key is to use existing approaches, in particular the **WHO certificate of vaccination** (the 'Yellow Book') to enable the rapid return of international travel and business. The key is that the vaccines have to work! We will know that

very soon with data emerging from countries with very high vaccination rates such as Israel and the United Arab Emirates. If the numbers of infected individuals and deaths plummet in those countries, then vaccination rates will take off worldwide and there is a good chance that we will move closer to what we had before the pandemic. We will probably never return to what it was like in 2019, but hopefully we will get close.

### How did you and your members feel about the prospect of holding a conference like Convening Leaders 2021, in the future?

I thought that the organisers did an amazing job given all the regulations and constraints. I was particularly tickled to have a giant screen lowered in between myself and the host, featuring **Prof Peter Doherty** from his home office in Melbourne as we did our panel discussion. The swabbing and testing procedures were complex but run pretty efficiently. Although I think that the **limitations on interactions** diminished the experience for most attendees, I could tell that many were happy to have these limited interactions after months of online meetings. One of the main reasons I attend international scientific meetings is the **opportunity to network and interact** with colleagues

and collaborators from across the world, often at random and not necessarily dictated by safe management measures. For a society like ISID with many members from low and middle income countries, a lot of these restrictions would make attendance at a conference like the recent Singapore meeting very challenging.

### Do you agree that COVID-19 has definitely left a mark for future generations by changing habits and behaviour patterns?

It is very hard to tell what is going to happen based on historical precedents as there probably has not been something like this since the Middle Ages. Mortality rates from the plague were much higher but business life was disrupted almost as badly. I think that the biggest changes will be in the area of **building design** with crowded meeting rooms and bars probably a thing of the past. There will be more **access to sanitary facilities** and hopefully **better ventilation** and **natural lighting** at convention centres. I am personally more afraid of what comes next. The current pandemic will end in the next few weeks or months but if a new strain of influenza emerges next year, the question is whether we will all feel compelled to repeat the same intensity of lockdowns and travel restrictions while we wait for a vaccine. I sincerely hope not! We need some kind of silver bullet to protect us from these new emerging pathogens as it is almost certain that they will appear. **PROMED** is ISID's early warning system and hopefully the clever people who have designed many of the technologies used in this pandemic, will study PROMED to better prepare us for the next big one.



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# “You can **never** say ‘**data**’ without the word ‘**governance**’”

Our closing session of PCMA Convening Leaders 2021 took us on a journey into a (not so distant) future. Where roundtables, lectures and physical meetings live together with robots, drones and VR glasses at the centre of your conference stage. The advantages of the new technological matrix are immense, which also opens up the floodgates for a flurry of doubts. For **Ayesha Khanna**, CEO of **ADDO AI**, an artificial intelligence solutions firm, the question is not ‘when’ but ‘how’. Welcome aboard this digital ship!

## To what extent did the technological advent change the principles and structures of various associations and companies?

I think the pandemic has fundamentally shifted the way we do work. Almost all of our clients with very large enterprises, hospitals, banks, governments are rapidly digitising. To reach their customers, clients and even their employees, they need to have a method of communication and relationship building that is not dependent on a physical location. However, most event companies or even in-house event leaders were not prepared. They didn’t know how to do it in an engaging and productive way. There’s both a technical aspect and also a user-experience aspect to it. First, we often see a UX designer for apps and websites but we never talked about UX designers for meetings or events. Second, there’s the **infrastructure** of setting things up while they use zoom or any other conference platform. Third, there’s the aspect of data governance and the sanctity of what is exchanged, to make sure it is secure not only from cyber hackers but also to allow people to speak openly, especially if you’re going to have breakout rooms. These are three things of great importance to me: the **technologist role, the user-experience designer and data governance**.

## Do you think that associations should become fully digital or maintain a sceptical position?

They shouldn’t be sceptical, we are moving towards a **hybrid world**. People should not go from one extreme to the other. Clearly, we’re not going to be able to substitute the joys of interacting in real time, with a completely digital presence. However, you can be much more **technological savvy** in how you work with your audience even in a physical setting. For example, you can find ways to personalise their experience by using facial expressions, or capture voice tones to gauge their interest or boredom in a particular topic, whether people listen online or in-person. Now, again, with this technology, you are using somebody’s personal features so you have to let them opt in. You absolutely need their permission. They must comply with GDPR and other regulations to make sure they allow you to use this data and how it is used to improve the experience.

## Are they open to it?

Some people would, some people would not. But if they are open to it, you can create better experiences. Because then, you could see how they react to something, which they would never put in a survey for example. The other thing is when people have questions, they always have to wait in a line to talk with a speaker – it is much better to have a chatbot that actually answers all these questions in multiple languages at the same time. I also think that events will change altogether. Obviously, we heard a lot about **VR, AR**, because





**AYESHA KHANNA**  
CEO of ADDO AI

the time has come, especially with 5G. In the future, you'll not be interacting with a cartoon-like character but characters, that rather look like us. If you go to 'Workplace from Facebook' and check what they are doing with 'oculus', you can really see the kind of effort they are putting in, with optical touch and targeted sounds. You really feel like you're right there! Even with AR, physical events can become much more influential. The right information at the right time leads to more efficient and high-quality customer experiences. I think there are many ways in which data can add value and inspire an event.

### **Is there still a fear factor behind the decision-making of all the AR and AI experiences at the service of events?**

The fear factor appears because people often think this is deep tech. The truth is that no company – be it a bakery or a publicity agency – can survive without a technologist on its team. You need people who know how to work with technology, who can get the vendors and plug with them. I always say, "own your data and protect the data of your customers." That's crucial! You can never say 'own' without the word 'permission'. You can never say 'data' without the word 'governance'. Otherwise, it is an incomplete equation. They are completely interconnected and, thankfully, people are much more aware of it. Event attendees should have the right to control their own statements and intellectual property. Of course, you can never sell anybody's data. There are good regulations around that. Once you get to the point, you can actually make it a much more enjoyable experience. Another thing is that you don't always have to look outside your team. Nobody understands your own business better than you do.

### **How crucial is it for organisations to establish broad partnerships and outsource this type of service to survive in a new environment?**

Partnering is a good choice, especially when you are paying for expertise you don't have. But if you want to bring people together for an interesting exchange of ideas, focus on what you know best, to understand the need for different types of suppliers within this ecosystem. Furthermore, your own team needs to have time. In order to even work with these vendors, your team needs to learn a little bit of technology. Otherwise, they will not be able to judge or critically evaluate the partners that they're meeting. You don't need too many gadgets, because you know your customer. You know what they want. In physical events, you can use robots to do a lot of work. With automation, a lot of the routines can be done by AI so that your team can innovate and create. You have to give your team a bit of time and leeway to learn some basics, so they can really try this new era and be excited about it.

### **How can we engage different generations on a common ground of understanding and co-working?**

The young generations are very digitally savvy – they are **digital natives** – but they are not being thought to be critical users of technology. Even adults need to learn that. When we become passive consumers of technology, we are unable to unlock our creative judgment. We have to think of ourselves as producers of services, rather than passive consumers. So, we need to stop thinking there's Facebook and Google, and only those people work on tech. All of us work on tech. It is a mind shift change, way bigger than any other skill we might have. That is the common ground – **(re)learning how to read**. Therefore, learning some computation literacy is the way you'll participate in the economy. Full stop! On the other side it levels the ground for all of us: in a philosophical approach to understand, value and implement an educational system for all ages.





# “We define the **future of hybrid** as **intersections of connectivity.**”

The growth prospects for **JUNO** could not be more optimistic these days. In less than a year, a California-born idea has quickly turned into a million-dollar business that helped lift the digital face of **Convening Leaders 2021**. But they have no desire to be just a transactional event platform: “We want to be a 365-day ecosystem for people to consume content, engage in communities and exchange in commerce.” CEO, **Josh Hotsenpiller**, helped us understand their vision during a call from San Diego.



## Tell me a little more about your company’s performance last year? How do you assess business growth for Juno during the pandemic?

I spent the last ten years building community software and pretty extensive community platforms. We build and create the global sales and enablement tools for **HP**, and the learning management systems for the **United Nations**. When the pandemic hit, I sought out my business partners to respond to our clients’ needs in the virtual space. Just to give you a timeline, we decided to start **Juno** on March 17<sup>th</sup>, the actual day that California went on lockdown. So, we spent the last Summer building Juno. We soft-launched it in October with sales in September, and grew multiple millions in sales in one hundred days. It was fast out of the gates! We took funding from the founder of **Insights Partners**, which is a growth-stage venture capital firm, we quickly hired 40 people in 60 days and now, we have in our hands 177 opportunities that came just in this month. Obviously, the **PCMA Conference** was a great success. We saw incredible engagement, and complimentary thoughts back on the platform and now we are working with PCMA to expand it. We want to provide

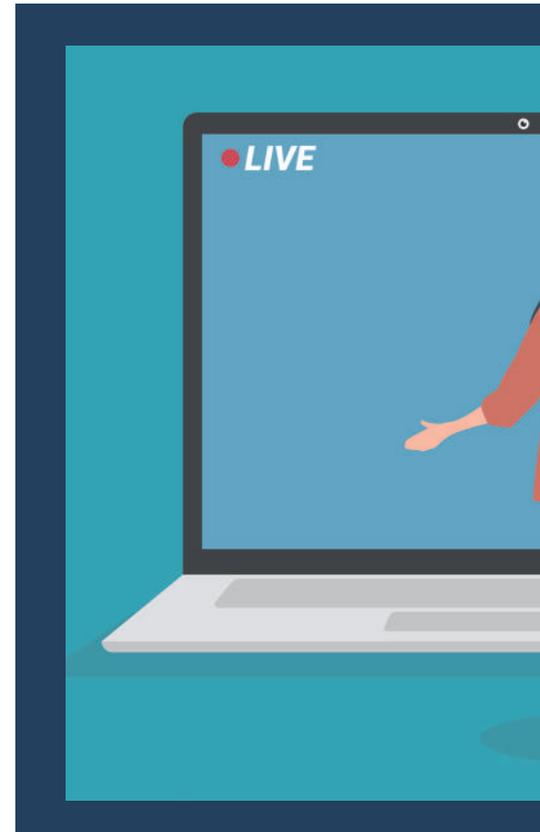
even more solutions for the industry so we are working hand in hand with PCMA in a strategic plan.

## What kind of solutions are these?

We look at three buckets of **content**, **community** and **commerce** and we asked ourselves how do we make sure that we’re creating what we called **interactive networks**. The flywheel growth. So how do people get into content and network? How do they get into community functions and network? How do they buy and sell from one another, in that network effect? We want to make sure that we’re driving education, collaboration and financial exchange to people who are inside our ecosystem. So that’s the big vision we are mapping out of it. If you are in Brussels trying to sell something that I need in San Diego, how can we make that transaction? **Sherrif** (Karamat, CEO of PCMA) likes to say that “the digital world has no knowledge boundaries”. That’s what we are really creating with them.

## What was asked by PCMA in the digital assembly of “Convening Leaders 2021”?

The most important thing that they



wanted was to create collaboration. How can we reimagine collaboration? So, we rolled out what we effectively call “cohorts” which allows us to do two things: pre-assign people to go through content journeys together; and randomly assign people to go through content together. For example, let’s say that two people meet in Singapore and both are interested in “leadership”, “wine”, and “governance”. We profile each of them, we try to find what they have in common and because of their profiles, we drop them on an experience together. Lastly, they meet one another while they go through that same content. That was the big proposal we wanted to achieve together and we did.

### Can you point out some challenges and undertakings when dealing with such a big conference like this?

The biggest challenge was the execution of support. How do you support basically 24/7 in multiple continents, and



how do you execute that well? I think it was the same even for the main team of PCMA. They were in Chicago and they still wanted to support people at their conference. Secondly, it was the multiple streams and capabilities from all these different imports and requirements. From a human standpoint, it was support; from a technical point of view, it was the assimilation of different types of streams to deliver in real time around the world. If there was some sort of setting in that machine and in that country preventing access, we had to come up with technical responders.

### How are VR and gamification affecting value propositions for your clients?

Fear has absolutely driven everything, for good and bad. Fear comes out of the fact that many of these conferences and associations have not hired people on their teams to do this. They’ve hired physical event planners but there is still a gap in staffing. We’ve got to fill that gap and make them feel safe about technology. At the end of the day, every one of these fun words like VR, AI and gamification have to be distilled down in a way that everybody can understand. It sounds *fun* and *sexy* to say the words but then, you actually have to explain them. For instance, this is how we, at Juno, explain AI to someone. There are two ways to build an artificial intelligence machine learning to target something to the user: the first is when we bring people on-board, asking them to declare what they are interested in by clicking tags; the second one is what we call “discovered”, that is, the things that they actually chose on the platform, and that differ from their previous interests. Those two value sets create a profile and then Juno acts to serve these three things: **content**, **experiences** and **people**. They will lead you to your future interests based on the “declared” and the “discovered”.

### How exciting is it for you to see this new digital mould taking shape?

The term digital migration is happening and people are finally embracing the process of, “wait a second! I can actually sit here and have a stimulating conversation with someone in Brussels, and not just Rick in Texas.” We define the future of hybrid as intersections of connectivity. Think of a triangle; we have someone physically, another person on the virtual side and then there is a point of connectivity. We triangulate these relations. What Juno is looking to do is map all of these global intersections of connectivity - so if I show up at a physical event in Texas but you are watching in Brussels, Juno can serve up a connection for us to talk and network. Instead of associations segregating people by region, they should join their regional hubs in any format possible. We should never go back to segregation.

### How do you see the future of social events and your actual business?

We all want to get back to where things used to be, but that’s never going to happen. I think there are four main reasons for it: future health risks; financial burdens; an otherworldly digital experience in terms of network and knowledge; and finally, evolution of opportunities. When you pull all of that together, associations will have to meet this new world that they never got to before, because of digital. They will not want to give that out! Therefore, the hybrid world is only going to evolve. At the same time, people will always want to get together, shake hands and hug. I like to say it will be an “and-world”, not an “or-world”. That’s where the world is going to head: a “yes-and-world”, not a “yes-or-world”.



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# “Despite switching to digital, **physical meetings** with members are **non-replaceable.**”

The **European Social Network (ESN)** is a growing community of more than 150 public authorities and organisations responsible for social services across Europe, and beyond. At the crest of this global tsunami, social services will be one of the first lifesavers for the multiple crises in social care, unemployment and public housing. We spoke with **Alfonso Lara Montero**, CEO of ESN about these sensitive topics and the pulse of his association in this dark year.

## **At the pandemic’s 1-year mark, how did ESN respond to the related constraints and challenges?**

COVID-19 has brought about incredible disruption for everyone, but it has also led us to implement digital, agile and remote ways of working. Despite the series difficulties we faced, ESN created and adapted extensive opportunities of **mutual learning** for our members and partners. We shifted to remote working to protect employees, and 100% online knowledge exchange and knowledge-building activities to serve members facing mobility restrictions almost overnight.

We mobilised global expertise instantly, organised meetings ranging from 30 to 300 people almost immediately, and responded to members’ inquiries more rapidly by providing everything digitally, from preparation to follow up. We were sad not to be able to run our annual conference onsite for the first time in 28 years. Nevertheless, we made a significant investment to ensure that our digital channels were up to speed to pivot to our first full virtual programme of workshops, working group meetings, annual seminar and the European Social Services Awards ceremony.

## **How are you looking to create value propositions and cooperation between your membership,**

## **while meetings and travels are not allowed?**

When the lockdown started across Europe and nonessential travel was restricted, we were faced with the challenge of continuing our activities through digital platforms. Interactive online meetings became the new normal for ESN members. When organising online meetings, we focused our work on our **members’ experience** and **knowledge**. By including them in the preparatory process and involving them as presenters and speakers, we have been able to keep their interest high.

We have managed to maintain a close relationship with our members by actively reaching out to them. For instance, we launched a dedicated webpage that gathered resources and best practice on how social services, across Europe, responded to the emergency created by COVID-19. We also led a series of webinars on relevant themes for them such as ensuring continuity of care, child support, impact on long-term care or crisis preparedness, as well as publications focused on these themes, such as the challenges, needs and impact of COVID-19 on social services crisis planning.

## **The pandemic will wreak havoc on the social fabric of our communities, leaving a deep crisis in education, employment and housing. Is**



## **ESN focused on promoting new and revamped public social services?**

We are aware of the heavy toll that COVID-19 has had on public social services and social care across Europe. Initial data from members indicate that as inequalities increase, so does the number of requests for social services support and their cost. Strong public social services not only act as an effective safety net to protect the most vulnerable, but they are also vital for economic recovery through the promotion of an inclusive society.

ESN has documented the strategic role of social services in the future recovery of Europe through the recovery and resilience facility and the next funds programming period. We have identified examples of investments that are necessary for the transformation of public social services that respond to the

needs of people and communities across Europe. We are working with our members to help them formulate proposals for a new model of community and family-home care for children with families, people with disabilities and older people with complex needs to respond to the current social emergency and to build more resilient social welfare systems.

**How important will it be to encourage coordinated responses between EU member states? What role will social policies and knowledge exchange play in the decision-making of recovery programmes?**

**Coordinated efforts** are crucial to ensure a successful response to the pandemic. As we saw at the beginning, when countries do not work together there is a risk of lack of solidarity. The approval of **European financial instruments** has been critical to cushion the most immediate social impact. Additional cohesion funds through the **REACT-EU** can help to mitigate some of the significant inequalities that have appeared over the last months, while the resilience facility could help to contribute to reforms in the sector.

Knowledge exchange and building is a very strong tool to inform national and European policies so that policy priorities respond to the concerns and needs of the directors, practitioners and people using social services. The work that ESN does at European level to document the concerns and needs of public social services is decisive to ensure that European guidelines are well informed. At national level, we are working with our members so that they promote innovative and transformative models of care that can help meet their needs while promoting a more resilient society.

**Beyond the massive rewards that tech innovation has brought to the heart of associations, isn't it also shrinking their multipurpose essence?**

The increased possibilities to use technology to achieve our network's objectives provides an unique opportunity to gather people from all corners of the world. They helped us stay close to the evolving needs of our members during the pandemic.

Physical meetings and contact with our members are non-replaceable. However,

today's technology provides us with options that we can use to expand our network and develop relationships with organisations across the world.

**With tech innovation, new sustainable practices and social protest movements underway, what will ESN's new working frame and fundamentals be to catch up with a new world?**

ESN has been the leading network for social services for almost 30 years. The first project led by ESN in 1999 was on personal budgets which is now promoted at EU level as an innovative tool. We have been at the forefront of planning and managing social services through the **European Social Services Conference**, a series of projects, our framework agreement with the European Commission and more recently the European Social Services Awards.

Public social services are the cornerstone of social welfare systems and policies. While they need to adapt to respond to evolving needs and be more resilient to crises, they will always be both a safety net and an economic investment. We will continue to promote strong public social services highlighting new and innovative models, using digital means and promoting partnerships across sectors. I believe that this approach will be more relevant than ever after the pandemic.



[ESN-EU.ORG](https://www.esn-eu.org)

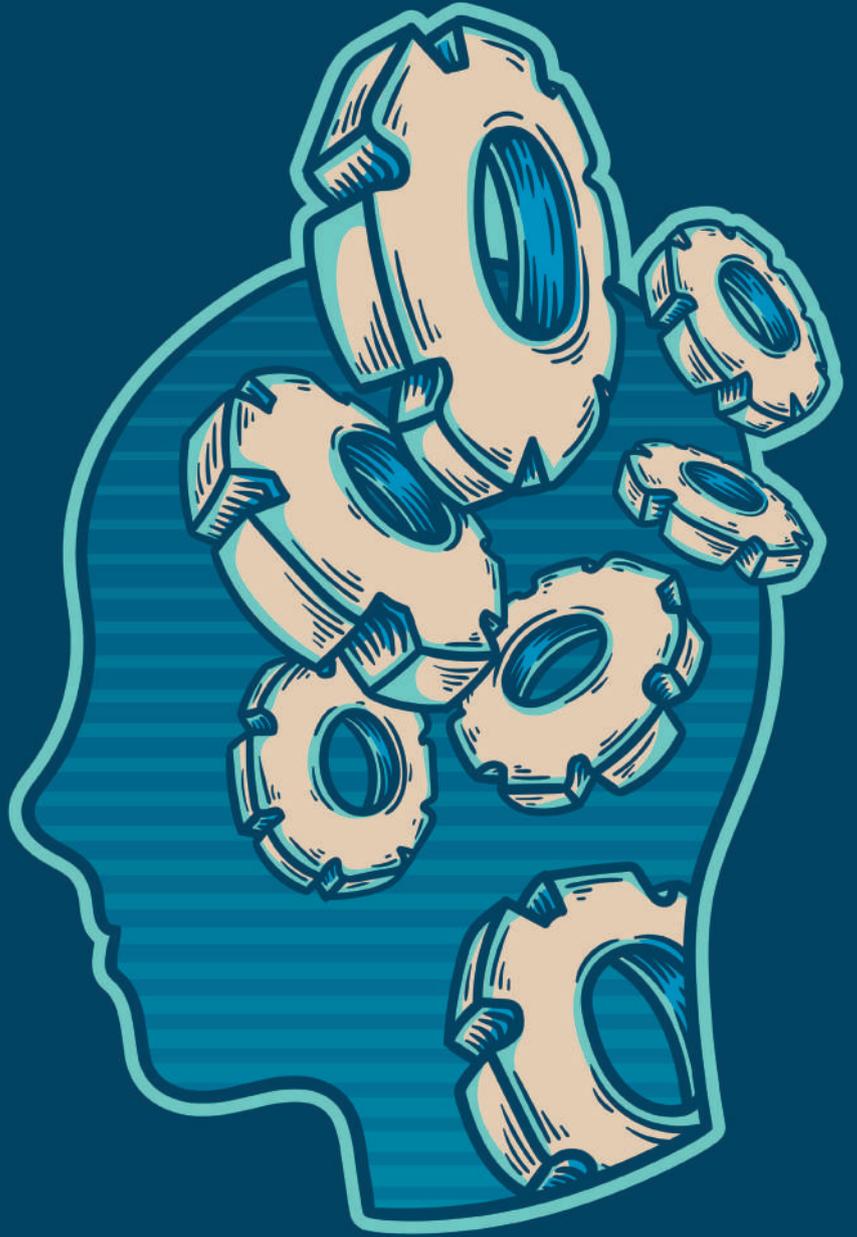


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# ASSOCIATION & PCO



# Location, Location, Location

Do you remember when associations used to spend a lot of time picking the right location for their event? There were internal politics at play, rotation patterns to be considered, site inspections to be done. In the past year, however, we have completely moved away from them to the world of ‘ones-and-zeros’, while destinations and convention bureaus (CVBs) got forgotten. Or were they?

While we cannot speak for all, many event professionals certainly made an effort to engage with their original hosts in the digital realm. The real problem occurred when new events started emerging that were never planned to take place live. By then, more cities and CVBs started to feel the pressure.

The **European Society for Paediatric Infectious Diseases (ESPID)**, was planning to hold its annual meeting in the city of Rotterdam at the end of May 2020. While COVID-19 was raging globally, the ESPID community found themselves busier than ever solving the COVID-19 riddle, while also having to make decisions about their meeting. The **Kenes Group** team stepped in and guided the association in these tough times, taking as much burden off their shoulders as possible. After the event dates were moved to October, it was decided that the event will go virtual.

The apparent question that occurred was: what will happen with Rotterdam? The event won't bring delegates to the destination, event halls and hotel rooms will be released. Still, Rotterdam had a meaning for the 36<sup>th</sup> ESPID annual meeting and the event had a special value for the city too – both for its subject and the city's knowledge institute, the **Sophia Kinderziekenhuis** at the **Erasmus Medical Center**.

The Kenes team started an open communication with **Rotterdam Partners**, the body in charge of the city's promotion, to explore what were the options to keep the destination at the heart of the event. Not only that but could it be reminded to the locals too that events continue to take place and engage with their destination?

Rotterdam Partners and the **City of Rotterdam** came up with a great idea on how to engage the local community.

One of the city's landmark buildings positioned beside the iconic *Erasmusbrug* was branded with the ESPID logo and a specially designed tagline by the city, **A Future for Every Child**, complemented by the city's own motto, **Rotterdam Make it Happen**. This animation played out on a giant digital screen for a full two weeks, reminding the city that events continue and that Rotterdam was at the centre of it all.

The new reality is posing challenges for all stakeholders in the industry. In order to reinvent ourselves, we should collaborate and think outside the box together. It should not be the same old, or translated for virtual, but new, different, satisfying a new set of needs. Only through collaboration will we build the road to recovery.

## ABOUT KENES GROUP

For over 50 years, it 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 the community, strengthen your association's brand through unforgettable experiences, foster change, inspire members, educate and improve your association's business performance.

## ROTTERDAM PARTNERS

The official destination marketing organisation and investment promotion agency, is proud of Rotterdam and is dedicated to moving the city forward. We focus on Rotterdam's image and promote the Rotterdam region nationally and internationally. We open Rotterdam's doors to future visitors, companies, residents and students and show them around our city. We enthuse and inspire them. We also convince them to visit, do business, locate their companies and hold their congresses in Rotterdam. And we encourage them to come here to live or study. Rotterdam Partners is consequently responsible for city marketing, acquisition marketing and works to develop a better business climate. This is how we strengthen the Rotterdam economy in the broadest sense of the term.



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# Implementing a **Sponsorship Strategy** that Provides **Long-term Revenue**

Sponsorship has always been an essential element of any association's meeting or conference. Traditionally, association-partner relationships have been limited to this strict definition. While a sponsor may return to support the next meeting and the one after that, the collaboration does not extend beyond a conference.

But sponsorship relationships are evolving, offering exciting new opportunities for associations to grow their membership and influence, as well as benefit from long-term sources of income. Moreover, in light of the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has never been more vital for associations to revisit and optimise their own sponsorship models. Several partners of the World PCO Alliance offer guidance on how associations can examine their sponsorship strategy and harness new sources of income.

**Gregg Talley of Talley Management Group, Inc. (TMG)** advises associations to start at the beginning. "Planners can no longer do things without considering the core objectives and desired outcomes of the partner organisations," he says. According to Talley, aligning sponsor goals with the initiatives within the experience is the most effective way to achieve a higher return on investment. Activations that provide value to the participants have been an ideal way to engage partners.

When it comes to developing opportunities for partners and participants to engage, events are at the top of the list. While hybrid and virtual events were long

viewed as fringe alternatives to the ideal face-to-face conferences, the pandemic has pushed these formats into the spotlight and forced associations to reform the ways in which their members come together. Hybrid and virtual events not only offer associations a way to maintain relevance for their members, but offer additional possibilities for associations to create member gatherings and to share valuable, timely content—and with these added platforms come more sponsorship options.

Before leveraging the possibilities of the digital world, **Nancy Tan of Ace:Daytons Direct** encourages associations to adopt an integrated event management and event marketing software that caters to all stages of an event lifecycle. Such a system can also track success at each phase of event creation to improve revenue streams before, during and after the event.

From there, associations are equipped to harness the possibilities of the digital world, a world that, Nancy says, provides a plethora of sponsorship possibilities: "In our digital world we have more comprehensive data analytics available, facilitating the association's task of delivering richer content and the right services and products to a wider audience. Because of this deeper knowledge, meeting organisers can better customise sponsorship packages."

While the traditional print opportunities (brochures, programmes, etc.) still exist, Nancy encourages associations to consider other options that she classifies under two key categories:



- **Digital** can include social media marketing with targeted messages customised to each sponsor as well as robust attendee data analysis that helps exhibitors quantify and better evaluate their qualified prospects.
- **Products or experiences** can include education sessions, special lounges, etc.

**Alain Pittet** of **Ega Worldwide**, acknowledges that one of the most challenging issues with virtual or hybrid meetings is offering sponsors and (virtual) exhibitors a platform to connect with attendees. In his experience, the following ideas have effectively brought new leads to sponsors and exhibitors: pre-booked one-to-one meetings during breaks, satellite symposia in branded 3D virtual studios, and commercials (like on TV) before and after the breaks or even as part of the programme.

“Digital event strategies and marketing services are an association’s main sources of income today,” Nancy points out. To help her clients harness these income sources, Ace:Daytons Direct collaborated with experts to create an integrated one-stop virtual or hybrid event solution that is flexible enough to suit a range of clients’ needs. But embracing virtual events is not enough, Nancy says: “an association can provide digital content in so many different ways, including video production, live streaming, virtual and augmented reality, 3D development, social media augmented reality, and more.”

Talley sees a plethora of exciting opportunities in augmented and mixed reality, which allows planners to overlay a three-dimensional world over our existing one. “This creative solution mixes the best of virtual - the ability to completely customise experiences - with being in-person and having that connection with peers,” says Talley. “Users can leverage this tool to navigate spaces, access content, and engage with other

participants. A thoughtful monetisation strategy aligning with the core objectives of the activations delivers a high potential new source of income.”

Pittet sees the value in making content available throughout the year, and he is noticing associations taking a more professional approach in packaging such content, including a pay-per-view model. In making content available year-round, Pittet says that associations are opening themselves up to a wealth of revenue possibilities. Though it might not be an easy transition for some, Pittet maintains that it is a non-negotiable. “Some associations struggle in offering all-year (corporate) sponsors – meaning, those paying an annual sponsorship for year-round visibility – an adequate presence throughout the year, but in our opinion, it is one of the most important strategic options for the future.”

The key benefit of providing a “365-day experience”, as Talley calls it, is the insightful data that allows associations to pair sponsors with those in direct need of those sponsors’ specific goods or services.

A strategic sponsorship approach not only provides associations with more revenue streams, but cost savings as well. For the **International Society for Extracellular Vesicles’ (ISEV)** 2019 Annual Meeting in Japan, **TMG** partnered with **Field Drive** to provide onsite badging, registration, and lead generation for exhibitors. The partnership resulted in high marks from attendees for streamlined registration, and from exhibitors for providing a new value add to their participation. Through Field Drive, ISEV was able to add new engagement options for exhibitors to connect with attendees. That resulted in several new revenue streams based on the tools that were available for exhibitors to use. That technology came with cost savings for exhibitors and ISEV as well. Exhibitors since reported that they could reduce their booth staff and

preparation for the meeting because of the lead generation system used at the event. ISEV managed to reduce the on-site staff by four, a significant saving.

In addition to all the obvious financial benefits of a renewed sponsorship strategy, there is a lesser discussed, but perhaps even more important reward in store: that of contributing to the global community.

As Talley points out, “experience creation goes beyond impacting just the participants in the room. It truly allows us to strengthen communities by driving global, social and economic change through nurturing intellectual capital and connecting diverse thoughts.”

For any association looking to maintain relevance, and a healthy bottom line, developing a robust sponsorship strategy that incorporates all the possibilities afforded by the digital world is a must. After all, sponsors play a role far beyond supplying an organisation with income. Sponsors also help organisations achieve their humanitarian goals, which might be the level of support that counts the most.



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# Partners Mean Opportunities and Support

Partnerships increase expertise, knowledge and resources available to offer better products and services. At ECM, partners are fully part of the community and, as such, share their insights, ideas and perspectives on the current challenges we are facing and on the industry in general. They provide regular research documents to our members, guiding them on latest trends. Last but not least, members benefit from new and exclusive business opportunities thanks to these privileged relationships.

## Research and Trends Reports

ECM members can improve their competitiveness through a series of reports provided by the association and its partners each year. The **ECM Knowledge Group Research & Statistics** publishes annual reports on the evolution of hotel bed nights in European cities (ECM Benchmarking Report), trends in the conference and business meetings market (ECM Meetings Statistics Report) and funding of our members (ECM Funding Survey). Quarterly, the group also publishes a report focusing on short-term tourism (ECM City Tourism Monitor) and reports provided by ECM partners on the hotel industry in Europe (ECM-MKG European Destinations Observatory), the air travelling behaviour (ECM-ForwardKeys Air Travellers' Traffic Barometer), residents' sentiments (ECM-TCI Research Residents Sentiment Index), bookings (ECM-ADARA EMEA Insights), Short-term rentals (ECM-Transparent Short-Term Rentals Report)... ECM partner Toposophy also offers yearly reports to ECM members on trending topics.

Throughout the years, ECM Research & Statistics Knowledge Group has built this solid network of research partners to provide members with regular and timely information on current challenges. You can't manage what you can't measure... partners are instrumental in providing knowledge and working with ECM members. In return, they learn and have a deeper knowledge on city tourism challenges.

## The ECM Summer School

The ECM Summer School, the meetings industry educational programme, provides each year 60 delegates

with the basis and know-how to progress a rewarding career in the sector. We live in an always evolving world, and the meetings industry is no exception. The 2020 COVID-19 crisis has made this statement even more accurate! In 2020, instead of meeting physically, ECM has developed an additional event dedicated to advanced meetings industry professionals including Summer School alumni, called ECM Summer School 2.0.

"It's a crucial task for top management in each organisation, whether it is a Convention Bureau (CVB), tourist board, congress centre, airline, hotel, DMC, PCO or meeting planner, to train every employee continuously. And during this hard time, let's not forget to continue this important mission," says **Pier Paolo Mariotti**, the ECM Summer School course leader.

Since 1987, the ECM Summer School sets out the background and context of the meetings industry with a focus on European and international best practices. Together and under the guidance of senior professional leaders from the industry, learnings include, best practice, acquisition of international events, how to adapt to new trends (hybrid meetings, sustainability...) destination sales and marketing strategies and an understanding of the matrix of client decision-making.

"This programme is a unique opportunity for young professionals just entering the meetings industry to spend three days with some of the biggest names in our business," Mariotti adds. "In the current context, this is even more important for participants to build on their knowledge and learn how we are adapting to this crisis that shook our industry and the entire



world. Similarly, the next weeks will be decisive to know what will be the best format to keep on our mission this year.”

The faculty are all members and/or partners of European Cities Marketing and give their time on a voluntary basis. A way of giving back to the meetings industry. Some of them are also part of the recently launched ECM Mentor Programme.

### The ECM Mentor Programme

“We developed many initiatives to stay proactive for our members during this difficult time,” says ECM President **Petra Stušek**. “With the people at the heart of our reflection, we decided that we had a role to play in the crisis by providing collaborative solutions beyond ECM members and therefore created the ECM Mentor Programme.”

Launched in 2020 during ECM Summer School 2.0, this programme is a free initiative created to secure networking, relation building and knowledge exchange between newly appointed and advanced professionals in the meetings industry.

Indeed, the COVID-19 has resulted not only in the cancellation and postponement of 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 Group** and **HQ Magazine**, the 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, to inspire, to share and grow together in the meetings industry.



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### Exploring your DMOJO

*Futuring the role of the DMO at ECM International Conference, March 17-19, 2021.*

For many years, discussions have centred on the magic M in DMO. Is it marketing? Is it management? Is it both? Or is it something entirely different? Now, following the pandemic crisis, perhaps it's time to realise that no one really cares what the M stands for, people care what destinations stand for. And that is why ECM is inviting tourism professionals to explore their DMOJO at the upcoming ECM International Conference!

We now know we each play a role in 'flattening the curve' – but what about the climate curve? The curve of social instability and inequality? Consumers are becoming increasingly guided by values in their consumption choices, which in turn sets new expectations to brands and what they stand for – including destinations in their marketing, messaging, development and commitment beyond tourism; what does your destination stand for?

Did all DMOs find their true mojo during the crisis – the ability to pivot, adapt role and relevance, while

maintaining a long-term perspective? Now, the global pandemic crisis has effectively erased all predetermined roadmaps and business-as-usual-thinking. The challenge is to define our DMOJO by the same key skill and mindset that will also define our future: the art of *futuring* itself! It is the ability to cope and navigate uncertainty, ask brave questions and experiment new solutions along the way, while insisting on thinking both short and long-term at the same time. It is the ability to reconfigure for the future.

While tourism was certainly missed in 2020, bringing back the tourism of before may not equal pure destination bliss. Looking forward – what role should and could tourism and destinations play in the face of future challenges and crises? What are the plans for recovery out there?

During ECM Online International Conference on the future role of DMOs and the trends that will shape it in the coming years (March 17-19, 2021), we will get the latest from DMOs, knowledge partners, industry experts and lead thinkers with inspirational insights, ideas, and perspectives to help unfold the theme of DMOJO!



# Moving **From Competition to Coopetition** Should Come **Naturally** to Associations

*So much has changed in the past year that it is hard to remember what was 'normal' before. It looks as if it might well-be late in 2021 before we are approaching anything close to pre-pandemic normalcy. Of course, there is no way that the global health crisis can really be considered as having a positive effect on anything. However, some interesting (and perhaps valuable) trends that this crisis created has begun to show some signs of a positive impact in the near future.*

**W**ithout exception, associations spent the last year dealing with some major challenges: reduced resources, both financial and human, change management, meeting and convention chaos and cancellations, remote staff and 'virtual' everything... and many other challenges unique to the association environment. It is this commonality of concerns that also provides opportunities for the future.

One of the biggest ongoing concerns of most Associations is staying ahead of their competitors – other associations and membership organisations in the same field or industry. This competition may be for members, for money, for credibility, for influence, for conferences, etc.

What would happen if these competitors found ways to work together to create win-win situations for everyone? What if these organisations moved from competition to coopetition?

Confession: I had to search the word 'coopetition', too. Here is what Google says: "*Coopetition is the act of cooperation between competing organisations; i.e. organisations that engage in both*

*competition and cooperation are said to be in coopetition*".

I like that. It describes what competing associations have done reluctantly on a limited basis for many years, but defines it as a strategy, not an activity. For example, many competing associations will work together on a common threat, such as a piece of legislation, but only when necessary. The rest of the time they are trying to outdo each other.

It's time to move on. It's time to stop believing that doing things bigger or better than another association in your field is a "win" for your organisation. Your members, sponsors, suppliers, supporters, and other stakeholders do not care who wins or who gets the credit. They care about getting the best value for their investment in your organisation.

So, let us look at some places where coopetition could serve for the greater good in today's and tomorrow's association community:

- **Education.** For decades, several of the fiercest competitors in the construction industry in the US fought for decades over whose training



## 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. He is also the current president of the National Speakers Association National Capital Area Chapter.

programme was better. The cost of duplication was staggering, until they collectively established a third-party educational institute for the entire industry.

- **Conferences.** Are there opportunities for trade shows to work together to book facilities and destinations back-to-back, and negotiate from that kind of strength? What about making selected speakers and programmes at your virtual conferences available to members of other associations?
- **Branding.** Isn't each organisation supposed to create its own brand? Sure, but that's about the organisation, not the industry or the profession or the destination. Why not pool the resources of several groups to create a better understanding of the value of a career in your field, or the impact your industry has on the economy of your community?
- **Influence.** This might be the best opportunity to be in cooperation.

When associations in the same field combine resources to change their industry or profession for the greater good, influencers will want to work with them. It is counterproductive to have multiple organisations claiming to represent the voice of the industry.

'Coopetition' may seem like an unusual word, but the concept is one that is critical to accomplishing organisational goals. The people, organisations and institutions we want to attract to support us in our mission want to know if we are willing to partner with others to attain our goals.

Show them that cooperation is part of your organisation's culture.

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# We are **Stronger Together**: Why Businesses **Need Each Other**

In today's fast-paced environment, a 'do-it-alone' approach is not the best strategy for growth. Companies that initially grew organically need to look for new ways to drive collaborative innovation that delivers on what their customers need today and in the future, writes the chairman of **ICOM Group, Ahmed El Shal**.

Collaboration and strategic partnerships are fundamental to improving business outcomes that will benefit everyone: businesses, customers and employees. So, it is essential nowadays for businesses to always be looking after the growth and wellbeing of our customers and sponsors, otherwise we will be losing them for good.

For any PCO to grow in its market, they must be fully aware of their customers' needs and requirements. We have to ask for their ideas on how to offer the most return on investment, listen to their feedback on what strategies have been more (or less) successful from their point of view. We have to be willing to customise events' packages that are based on each company's needs.

During this unprecedented time, countries around the world began a phased reopening of businesses following a months-long period of shutdown, however, large-scale events and conferences are being approached with caution. Events throughout the spring rapidly shifted from in-person to virtual and hybrid – to varying levels of success – and, as we look ahead, it is likely most events for the foreseeable future will continue to be either all virtual or have a strong online component. While the health and safety of attendees may be at the heart of this decision, many associations are also seeing the shift to virtual events as an opportunity to engage with a larger audience in new ways.

While PCOs will never fully replace the live event experience, with thoughtful, strategic planning, they started to integrate innovative ideas into their business plans to support the event's owner to pursue their business goals and maintain a strong bond with their clients. By replacing the live events with the virtual and hybrid templates, many of the same goals can still be met, such as furthering industry education, creating professional connections and networks, and building relationships between people and businesses.

PCOs succeeded to help their exhibitors and sponsors gain visibility and better engagement with their target audience before, during and after the virtual and hybrid event by applying the following initiatives:

1. Offer an opportunity for companies to sponsor specific sessions or educational tracks that are related to their industry and provide them with the needed branding options.
2. Some attendees may experience zoom fatigue after a day of virtual sessions, many more will look forward to the social opportunities that are such an invaluable part of conferences. PCOs started to integrate the idea of a virtual lounge so small groups can gather in between sessions for networking purposes.
3. Allow your sponsors' voices to be heard by sharing their valuable



expertise and knowledge as session speakers.

4. Provide other options for a successful networking between attendees and exhibitors, such as creating an interactive exhibitor directory which should be searchable and easy to navigate, the more information the better: company profiles, website links and supplier contact information are a must.

As an industry leader in Egypt and the Middle East, **ICOM Group** had a proactive engagement plan ready to put into action in order to cope with this challenging time that we are experiencing nowadays.

Our Commercial and Partnership Division, collaborating with the Business Development Division, successfully integrated commercial activities and the resources of sponsors into events and projects' programming, such to improve the audience experience and help them perceive sponsors as authentic and relevant. Collaborative capabilities include the ability to identify partners with complementary resources and to establish a relationship management infrastructure that facilitates interaction and resource combinations between partners. In turn, this enables the events' committees and associations to identify and handle potential conflicts and to build trust. These capabilities have impact on resource integration and thus the value generated by and for the events and project organisation.

Several initiatives had been put into action with partners, sponsors and payers; the main focus was to help our partners take part in one-on-one sessions and a slew of activities from anywhere in the world. So we designed some online and hybrid actions that feature pre-recorded and live-stream events, infographics and sessions that partners and sponsors can view the latest debuts at their convenience.

We succeeded in implementing the following:

- **Account-based marketing events.** Highly targeted and customised experiences designed to address specific client's or prospect's needs.
- **Intimate breakfasts, lunches and dinners.** Small events with a focus on networking or thought leadership, either customer- or prospect-focused.
- **Fair to compare meetings.** Focus gathering with each partner or sponsor team with a concise plan of action of chosen future products to show and set out the funding capabilities and benefits in each one.
- **Online collective videos and campaigns.** That create quick awareness, engagement and unite the vision of all MICE leaders and stakeholders during the pandemic time of COVID-19.

Big breakthroughs and progress can't happen in silos. Working collaboratively

with partners – within an organisation as well as within the ecosystem to solve business problems – generates the kind of energy that fuels growth, innovation and creativity. Developing value-aligned partnerships that focus on common goals and complementary strengths is key to ensuring successful outcomes for all.

*ICOM was founded in 1998 by Ahmed and Belal El Shal with a vision to serve commercial, professional and medical communities worldwide, by helping them connect and learn, and by providing access to content and intelligence that helps people and businesses work smarter and make better decisions faster.*

*More info: [icomgroup.org](http://icomgroup.org)*

*This article was provided by the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers. IAPCO represents today 137 companies from 40 countries, including over 9900 professional congress organisers, meeting planners and managers of international and national congresses, conventions and special events.*



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# #Natureworks: An Ecosystem of Event Success

In a sector that is competitive by nature, radical transformation and collaboration is challenging for many yet has the ability to deliver results that are good for all stakeholders - writes **Melissa Baird** from **GDS-Movement**.

A recent report by the GDS-Movement (sponsored by the IMEX group and Marriott International) has explored the new paradigm of event management and success. The ‘regenerative revolution’ lays down the principles of circularity, as established by leading proponents of the model and offers a framework based on nature’s principals that considers the benefit of the whole system to establish success.

It explores and asserts that for the global meetings and events industry to recover, flourish and thrive in a future world, the temptation of adopting COVID-19 recovery strategies based on a wish to return to the ‘normal’ of the past must be overcome.

Instead, use the pandemic as a ‘great reset’ to rethink, reimagine and redesign a new restorative, resilient, inclusive and zero-carbon growth model. By doing so we can restore and rejuvenate the planet, its people and create a healthier economy, rather than seeking to sustain what no longer functions.

This deep cultural and systemic transformation requires a paradigm shift in beliefs, values and business models. The result will be heightened resilience when faced with the further risks of climate change, biodiversity collapse and social unrest.

In a circular and regenerative economy, economic activity builds and rebuilds overall system health. It is restorative and regenerative by design. The concept



recognises the importance of the economy needing to work effectively at all scales, for big and small businesses, for organisations and individuals, globally and locally.

## A regenerative future, inspired by nature

Regenerative events have a focus on quality, effectiveness, harmony and wellness. They are circular by design aiming for energy, natural resources and materials to be conserved, enriched, reused, recycled and used



to enhance equitable development. They design out waste and pollution and improve resilience by increasing diversity, inclusivity and equality. They also focus on regenerating and rejuvenating natural systems and communities.

The GDS-Movement's **Hannuwa** – a framework for event management – has four key principles and an eight-step methodology which serves to inspire, educate and guide event professionals on their transition to more regenerative and circular event management.

The result is an approach where event planning, resourcing, procurement and production are designed and managed to optimise ecosystem functioning and human well-being.

### Events and capital generation

Through integrating the four core principles into the business models, design and operations of events, the old linear systems' thinking is disrupted and there is an accelerated shift to more purposeful, inclusive and regenerative practices based on living systems design.

Instead of viewing the hosting and supplier community as supplying resources and assets in the organisation of the event, consider how the event itself provides “ecosystem services” back to the community and thereby offers enhanced value.



By rethinking and redesigning how events create impact for stakeholders, events can generate:

- **Natural capital:** by protecting, restoring and regenerating ecosystems and services;
- **Human capital:** by creating jobs, satisfying employees, improving people's health, creating new knowledge, skills and motivation;
- **Social capital:** by stimulating innovation, collaboration and the development of thriving and inclusive communities, businesses, trade unions, schools, and voluntary organisations;
- **Financial capital:** by generating incomes, creating shareholder value, strengthening competitiveness, and building business resilience;

### Case Study: Croke Park Stadium, an example of how to empower your community

Developing the value in an organisation may represent itself as the need to nurture staff, clients, supply chain partners, and other stakeholders. By taking a regenerative approach to community management, the development of social capital can be stimulated and enhanced. **Croke Park Stadium** in Dublin espouses this approach.

The stadium, which is a business member of the **All-Ireland pollinator plan**, implements an urban biodiversity programme that includes the installation on stadium grounds of bird boxes for native bird populations and of insect habitats such as bee bricks and bug hotels as well as a planting programme of native trees and pollinator-friendly ground cover.

Outside the stadium walls, Croke Park's sustainability and community teams have partnered with local authorities and residents on initiatives for the thoughtful greening of neglected spaces in the local area.

The Croke Park approach to sustainability and community ensures that the stadium generates not only employment and business opportunities in the area but also engenders huge pride of place in the local community. This investment in people and place contributes to the sense of belonging and well-being that is shared by residents and stadium employees alike. It has enabled Croke Park to act as the heart of the complex and vibrant community of Dublin's North inner city.





# Membership Engagement: When Members Tell Your Story

Members are the lifeblood of an association. Fully engaged, they make our associations thrive, have impact and offer a meaningful experience. But having active involvement can be hard – and when it dips, so do membership, morale, finances & results. So, how to boost engagement?

We're investigating engagement strategies – what's your association doing to ensure members grasp your purpose and are able to participate in your causes? Do you have a platform in place that makes collaboration easy? Are your members making progress together? How do you promote their contribution?

**Jimena Gómez de la Flor** speaks with **Jeffer London** about members teaming up to make progress. As communications director at the **European Flavour Association (EFFA)**, Gómez de la Flor tells the story of their success.

## **PURPOSE** How do members make sense of your *raison d'être*?

EFFA is the voice of flavours in Europe. We give voice to our members, speaking as one to the European policy-makers and customer associations. Our association brings together the wide diversity of the flavour universe, from small flavour houses to global stock-market listed companies and we distill what we all have in common to create the essence of a very creative and dynamic industry, who has a lot to say. Our members perceive this community feeling and embrace it. The national associations' role is crucial in this, so we make sure that they are involved at all levels.

## **PARTICIPATION** How do your members get involved?

Our members are at the core of what we do. They get involved in the committees and we work together in projects for the benefit of the entire industry. The

challenge is that often volunteers are always the same people. Those who volunteer are very engaged in the association and at different levels: board, regulatory, communication and public affairs, are all the association's motor. But there are hundreds of other employees from our members' companies who are little or not familiar at all with the association. That changed with our **Flavour Ambassador programme**. We looked for volunteers, not only for association committees but for a large communication campaign. This allowed us to reach out to a much broader spectrum of our member's employees and the brand became a synonym of recognition and source of pride. This increased the interest in the association's activities and projects, and the members' participation in them exponentially.

## **PLATFORM** How do your members connect and collaborate?

Most of the work done at committee's



level is through the member network. We have several closed groups where committees or dedicated task forces work together. They can collaborate in documents, presentations or videos in real-time. These communities are managed by the secretariat and are very effective to get specific projects done. But we realised lately that also LinkedIn is a very helpful platform to connect and stay in touch with a larger base of our members, for example, with our flavour ambassadors. We use it as a powerful internal communication tool, tagging, sharing and commenting on our members' posts to create conversations around EFFA's projects. This has proven to be a very effective way to keep the members interested and develop synergies.

### **PROGRESS** How do your members move things forward?

At the end of the day, internal and external communication are strongly interlinked. Our Flavour Ambassadors programme was an external communication campaign for which internal communication was key. We launched a powerful internal communication campaign to look for volunteers for the

flavour ambassadors, so the community arising from this call was very strong and motivated. Everyone involved, not only the ambassadors but their colleagues, managers or friends, served as spokespersons of the campaign, turning it into a snowball effect that created a strong and united voice both internally and externally. The role of the flavour ambassadors was to explain in first person what flavours and the flavour industry are, setting an example of what a passionate industry is and how connected it is to memories and emotions. 49 flavour ambassadors, 19 companies, five languages and one common passion for flavours. This community feeling made the industry, its message and the association, stronger than ever.

### **PROMOTE** How do you recognise member's talents?

The members are the ones who know the industry, not us. They are the ones who live and breath flavours. We, as an association, serve only as catalysers of that passion, giving them the opportunity to communicate it to the outside world. I think that identifying those talents and giving them the right platform, is the best way for an association to thrive,

so we base most of our communication projects on our own people. This creates loyalty and engagement beyond our own expectations. For our flavour ambassadors, we created a whole line of merchandising: pins, awards, personalised signature, posters, etc. And they still use it in their own communication. Our members own the projects and the brand, which is the best way to move our plans forward.

### **POSTSCRIPT** Any other advice for creating engagement?

Maybe it's easier for us because it's about food and flavours, but I really think that when planning any member's engagement project, we have to remember to have fun. To offer them the right set-up to just relax and enjoy, which will bring to meaningful connections. Before the shooting of our flavour ambassador video interviews, we had a chocolate atelier, a make-up artist preparing them and fun photos. By the time we got to the interviews, the atmosphere was relaxed and fun and they had been talking among them about what they share: the passion for food. As a result the interviews were natural, spontaneous and totally on spot.

*"Celebrate your members, they are the best ambassadors of your association."*

*Jimena Gómez de la Flor - European Flavour Association*

#### **ABOUT AUTHOR**

*Jeffer London is on the board to the International Association of Facilitators (IAF) and hosts the Facilitation Impact Awards.*

*The IAF promotes facilitators and all who use facilitation to help people work together effectively. Looking for better facilitation? Check out IAF-world.org or talk to Jeffer directly about facilitating leadership teams and association-wide engagement initiatives.*

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#### **ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEE**

*Jimena Gómez de la Flor is the communications director of EFFA, the European Flavour Association. EFFA represents flavour houses and national flavour associations across Europe. It is the voice of flavour in Europe, leading a Europe-wide strategy to the benefit of the flavour industry, its customers and consumers alike.*

*More info: [effa.eu](http://effa.eu)*



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