

The AACB IMEX 2008 Prize Informative Report

By Ian-Michael Farkas

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IMEX is the essential worldwide exhibition for meetings and incentive travel. This year 3,500 exhibitors attended from 150 countries representing national and regional tourist offices, major hotel groups, airlines, destination management companies, service providers, trade associations and more. Over 3,600 hosted buyers from 58 world markets visited IMEX 2008, contributing to a total of 8,700 visitors for the show's busiest three days ever.

My first impression of IMEX was mind boggling; the sheer size of this tradeshow was nothing like any of the shows I had previously experienced or even imagined. From the moment I walked into the registration booth I could see hundreds of visitors, exhibitors and staff already in the mood for a good show. I knew from the first moment I stepped in that this was no small show and that I had to brace myself and do my very best to check the competition and their efforts to promote themselves to the international market.

During the first of day of the show, I had the entire day "off". These meant I had no scheduled programs to attend or any booths to be at. So quickly I took advantage of this time to visit the "big boys" we always talk about here down under....Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, Austria, UK, Spain, China, United Emirates and USA. The one thing that blew my mind was that within the combined booths of Spain and USA you could have easily fit the entire AEE show. The effort and investment put behind each booth design, concept, collateral and staffing was simply incredible. If at any time in your life you are in doubt how serious and high yield business events are worldwide, I recommend to simply attending IMEX, words are hard to describe it; the amount of investment these countries inject in order to stand out and hopefully get the business is mind boggling.

So after my initial tour of 5 hours through the show, which only got me to see half of the stands, I went to say hello and visit the Business Events Australia Booth. There I encountered many familiar faces (Jon Hutchison AM, Lyn Lewis-Smith, Josh Roberts, Annabel Davis, Tom Hill, Annabel Sullivan, Joyce DiMascio, Lynn Fairbrass just to name a few) and some new ones which I was very pleased in introducing myself to (Barbara Howlet, Michel Couturier, Clemencia Wiese, also just to name a few). I attended the Press Conference by the SCVB and was present at Business Events Australia's (BEA) new brand launch at their stand. I was also kindly invited by BEA's GM Joyce DiMascio to sit with her over an interview with journalist from trade magazines. So, on my first day I had the opportunity to experience the show, network with colleagues, and witness the Australian efforts to stand out in a crowded market place.

On the morning of the second day of the show I attended a seminar on "Meetings Architecture" by Maarten Vaneste. This is basically a programme on how Event planners are not yet recognized as a proper profession or career within universities, and how this initiative could change that perception, and by incorporating it as a degree, people who specialized in producing meetings could become a lot more professional. I felt it was a very relevant issue to the industry and quite interesting. Later that day I finished reviewing the other half of the show and spend some time at the Australian booth.

In the afternoon the “IMEX/MPI Future Leaders Forum” program commenced. Even though the first sessions on this afternoon were optional, I decided to attend the entire program. The program included a Personality type assessment run by Ann Holmes CMM, Author of *The Rainbow-Plus*. This session resulted in finding out that I fall into the “Extravert Senser Thinker Perceiver*” type of personality...mmm interesting concept. Afterwards the entire forum was taken to the Sheraton Frankfurt Hotel and Tower for a presentation on how Starwood can help you to begin your career with them, the programs they run to keep you motivated and the potential to grow within their organisation.

A very special evening was awaiting for me, because later that night I was invited to attend the Gala/Awards dinner at the Frankfurt Opera House (Alte Oper) where I was actually called up to the stage by Paul Flackett (IMEX Managing Director) as the winner of the 2008 Vin Barron IMEX prize for AACB staff. The Award was presented to me by Ray Bloom (IMEX Chairman). During the evening I had the pleasure to sit next to Maria Jose Alves (ICCA Latin America Regional Office) and Jane Vong Holmes (ICCA Asia Pacific Regional Office) and Joanne H. Joham (ICCA North America Regional Office). Again a great networking and profile opportunity for people working in the business events industry.

The last day of the show involved compulsory attendance of the IMEX/MPI Future Leaders Forum. All day we had presentations ranging from the Director of Operations from MPI, the GM of Starwood hotels in Germany, the Director of International Relations from IMEX, the VP of MCI, the Director of Talent and Development from MCI, the Chapter Meeting Manager from MPI, the winners of the IMEX Internship Programme, the Managing Director of RJA GB Ltd, and the Managing Director of Richard Lewis Communications. The focus on all of the presentations were on introducing the meetings and events industry to the students, encouraging them to see the benefits and insights for a potential career for them. Included in the program was a slot for me to present, initially scheduled at midday after the introduction from Ray Bloom and Katie Callahan-Giobbi from MPI. Unfortunately, Jon Hutchison and Lyn Lewis-Smith, who came to attend the presentation, had to leave because my slot was pushed back. At 4:30pm the sessions finished and my journey came to the end.

I would like to acknowledge Jon Hutchison AM and Lyn Lewis-Smith for their support and confidence in me for this prize, plus Ray Bloom, Paul Flackett, Tom Hulton and Dale Hudson from the IMEX team 2008 for their hospitality and attention during my time in Germany. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Anthea Somerville of Qantas for her support, the return flights from Sydney to Frankfurt, her encouraging words and her positive feedback regarding my presentation. Last but not least Mike Cannon and the Board of AACB for their continued efforts in providing this great opportunity, and being behind great initiatives which I consider a significant investment for Australia’s future in the Business Events industry.

Please don’t hesitate to contact me at SCVB if you would like to discuss any aspect of the Prize.

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**Extravert Senser Thinker Perceiver: Tends to be stimulated by the company of others, and to enjoy conversation and the exchange of ideas. Concerned with establishing the facts of a situation and moving on to get things done. Likely to base decisions on logical reasoning and to develop general rules and standards, which finds important to apply consistently. Where possible, tends to avoid rigid timelines and deadlines, preferring to work flexibly. In general seeks to keep options as open as possible. .*