



AACB PRIZE

IMEX 2007

Presented by
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My Position at the Bureau:

I commenced at MCVB in August 2006 after having spent numerous years working in 5 star hotels in Melbourne and Ireland. My initial position at MCVB was in the capacity of Sales Coordinator, however, have recently been promoted into a new role as National Account Manager. The key responsibilities that I have are:

- Secure business events for Melbourne within the National corporate, government and association markets.
- Work in conjunction with our Marketing team to develop a direct mail campaign, and establish a corporate events database.
- Prepare e-bid proposals in response to leads and enquiries generated from sales and promotional activities.
- Supervision of VenueMenu Sales Coordinator
- Conduct face to face sales calls with clients and suppliers.

Challenges Facing Bureau Leaders:

Naturally, there are numerous challenges that we're faced with including more competitive bids, constant technology updates and global security concerns.

I have identified 4 key challenges that bureaux leaders are currently faced with. Those include:

- a) Financial Sustainability
- b) Environmental Responsibility
- c) Emerging Destinations
- d) Skills Shortage



Financial Sustainability:

It is critical for Bureaux to develop and expand the Business Events Industry. In order to do this, we require the financial support from not only our members, but our Government.

As a bureau, we constantly need to demonstrate the importance of Business Events to Government along with ROI if we are going to continue to receive adequate funding.

Melbourne is fortunate to be in a position of receiving support from our government. As an example, they are committed to building a new Convention Centre to be opened in 2009 at a cost of \$1billion. As a result, this now puts us in a position to bid for much larger pieces of business, as the infrastructure will be able to accommodate the growing number of delegates that are attending conferences. Consequently we will be able to demonstrate an increase in economic impact from Business Events generated.

So far, MCVB has assisted in securing 10 major conferences for this new centre worth an estimated \$210million in economic impact. This is a clear indication of how important the Business Events industry is for Melbourne.

MCVB is quite unique in the sense that we have a very strong business relationship with the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, something that is quite rare in other cities. The CEO's of these two organisations share the same goals of making Melbourne the number 1 destination for business events in Australia. Both organisations come together as a united front to request funding, which is something that may be rare and challenging for other Bureaux and Centres to do together.

Bureaux should also be serious about market research and obtaining hard data that demonstrates the economic impact of business events. MCVB has commenced the new Melbourne Convention Delegate Survey which is the largest of its kind ever undertaken in Australia. More than 4000 delegates will have been surveyed by the end of 2007 providing evidence to Government of the benefits of Business Events.



Environmental Responsibility:

There is no doubt that our industry needs to take some responsibility for the environment. 'Greener Meetings' are at the top of everyone's agenda right now, and for good reason.

Delegate numbers, conference centres, association members and general population is increasing. Whilst this is all positive for our industry, we need to be mindful of the repercussions that arise.

This challenge can and must be addressed. Tourism Vancouver has recently adopted a program which includes the purchase of carbon offset credits for their flights. This is an excellent example of a bureau showing leadership on addressing this issue. It is my understanding that the Adelaide Convention and Tourism Authority have also implemented a similar project.

Let's avoid a potential *Carbon Tax* as part of airport surcharges! There are already airport taxes and fuel taxes. Carbon taxes *could* become another challenge that we may be faced with in the future. This could bring the total cost of airport surcharges beyond the current \$450 per international delegate in Australia.

An environmental conference recently staged in Australia planted a mini forest at the conclusion of their conference in recognition of the carbons that were created during the flights of all delegates. This is another example of creative thinking within the industry when bidding for conferences.

The Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre will be the first 6 star Energy rated building of its kind in Australia. Re-thinking the design of centres and operational procedures including waste, air-conditioning, paper recycling, lighting and more all contribute to a healthy environment.

It is clear that we need to address this issue right now, and demonstrate to other industries how committed we are to the environment.

While doing some good for the environment is noble, we need to prove the commercial advantages of conducting 'green' meetings to get the issue on everyone's agenda. I intend to undertake a review of 'green' initiatives introduced by other Bureau in order to benchmark Australian performance.



Emerging Destinations:

As more and more destinations are joining global alliances such as *Best Cities*, *7 Centres*, *All Corners of the World* and *Conventions Australia*, we are also seeing the dramatic increase of new convention centres being built in new destinations.

Governments within emerging destinations are now realising the economic benefit that Business Events bring, and are consequently being more aggressive in their bids. Destinations such as Shanghai, Macau, Dubai, India and Eastern European countries are now competing for the same business that some of the more ‘traditional’ destinations have been targeting.

According to recent trend reports, over 1/3 of the world’s construction cranes are currently building approximately 120 new convention centres in China alone. As the majority of these are new centres with the latest technology, what was once seen as ‘top of the range facilities’ in other venues are now just entry level requirements that a centre must have in order to win the bid. This includes features such as wireless internet, prayer rooms and flexible seating options such as the ‘gala seating system’ for quick turnaround of an auditorium configuration to a flat floor banquet setting in less than 10 minutes.

In order to address this challenge of competing with emerging destinations, we should implement stronger marketing campaigns to promote the city. MCVB has recently led Australian Bureaux by advertising on BBC World throughout Asia, being the first and only Australian Bureau ever to do this to date.



Skills Shortage

It is a real challenge to find skilled staff to not only fill key management positions, but operational positions as well. Basically, there is a general lack of skilled workers in most positions in our industry.

Asian & European destinations potentially have an additional challenge of finding multi-lingual staff to assist not only International delegates coming into their city, but domestic delegates as well. For example, there are hundreds of different dialects in China alone.

Our industry is the 2nd largest employer in Australia, however, it has the perception of being a poorly paid sector, which consequently deters people and finds them attracted to alternative industries with more competitive labor rates. This is something that needs to be addressed and I have commenced preparing a standard PowerPoint presentation for MCVB senior staff to use at presentations to University students. I would also recommend the use of the AACB video “Conventions means Business” to assist in promoting our industry.

Future Aspirations

I am committed to this industry and believe that we cannot ignore the environmental challenges that we are faced with. One of my key aspirations that I would like to achieve, aside from increasing the percentage of Association meetings to Melbourne, is to establish an environmental benchmark for Australian Bureaux.

To assist in achieving this, I believe that it is important to educate, train and develop the next generation to prepare them for these issues. This is something that I have recently commenced by addressing students at Melbourne Universities, as well as being a mentor for some students who show enormous interest in our industry. By continuing discussions with heads of Educational Institutions, hopefully we will be able to implement the environmental issues into their syllabus.

Conclusion

I would particularly like to thank AACB, Qantas, IMEX and MCVB for providing me with this outstanding opportunity. I look forward to working with you all, as an industry, to address not only these issues mentioned, but any others that may arise in the future.