



ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIAN
CONVENTION BUREAUX INC.

THE ASSOCIATION BEHIND THE
BUREAUX WHO MARKET AUSTRALIA
FOR BUSINESS EVENTS



Brisbane Marketing
BRISBANE'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENCY



AACB Staff Scholarship Report 2009
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Background

“Queensland has enjoyed a healthy share of the Australian business events market over the last decade but there are signs the state's business events market is starting to plateau and market share is starting to decline, particularly in the international marketplace.”¹

“There is now greater global demand to deliver business events which have strong social and environmental focus. Increasingly, corporate meeting and incentive planners from around the world are seeking information on venues and services in Australia, which can assist businesses in staging events that are more sustainable.”²

These two reports shaped my ideas for this project.

Project overview

During the first two weeks of February 2010 my AACB Staff Scholarship project was completed. The objective of my submission was to visit a green meeting destination to study the specific strategies that not only create a green image for a city but which also translate to evidence “on the ground” of sustainable environmental practices having been installed.

To achieve my objective, February 1st to 6th was spent in Portland, Oregon with their Convention & Visitors' Bureau, Travel Portland, to learn all about their green/sustainable initiatives. I met with representatives from their Convention, Leisure, Marketing, PR and Membership teams as well as industry partners including two leading hotels and the Convention Centre.

February 9th to 11th was spent in Denver, Colorado attending the Green Meetings Industry Council's (GMIC) Sustainable Meetings Conference 2010. The conference took me to a whole new level of sustainable discussion – from in-house merchandise procurement and social media as a more sustainable marketing tool, to destination-wide composting and international standards for certifying a meeting as green.

¹ *Events Review – Queensland*, David Williams, August 2008, p43

² *National Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Audit, For Australia's Business Events sector*, Business Events Australia, Tourism Australia, February 2009, p3

Key findings

Aim one

To study the process undertaken by a meeting destination that transformed itself into a green meeting destination.

Portland, Oregon was the perfect choice to achieve this aim. Not only is Portland a popular American meeting destination, it is widely recognised amongst its peers as a pioneer of sustainable meetings best practice.

Below is a summary of specific actions undertaken at various phases of Travel Portland's sustainable journey.

Getting started

In the first half of this decade Travel Portland recognised a need to differentiate itself from other meeting destinations in order to increase its share of the business events market. Its team identified sustainability as a way to create a point of difference and thus set about the process of transforming the Portland business events industry into a green meeting destination.

The initial steps involved researching accreditation programs that Travel Portland was willing to recognise. They then communicated its green strategy to stakeholders. Travel Portland outlined the potential benefits of becoming more sustainable and encouraged members to come with them on the green journey.

Following the initial call to action, Travel Portland surveyed its members to establish their green status. Data gathered from the survey formed the first listing of green facilities and services for business events within the city.

Travel Portland also aligned with a Portland-based green PCO, MeetGreen, founder of the Green Meeting Industry Council (GMIC), to develop a pool of resources for planning a sustainable meeting.

Evolution

A large part of Travel Portland's green evolution has been a continual expansion of its initial steps. Specifically:

- Travel Portland has continued to research and be abreast of accreditation programs for the business events industry.
- To entice more members to be greener Travel Portland gives additional recognition to those with green accreditation. This includes greater coverage on their website listing and references in green themed collateral.

- Travel Portland delivers two member events a year as green and each focuses on an aspect of sustainability.
- Travel Portland has created a sustainability category within their Annual Awards program.
- Travel Portland actively pursues accreditation and awards that align with their sustainable beliefs.
- In conjunction with MeetGreen, Travel Portland recently launched a green meetings tool kit – an online resource for members and clients with information on all stages of running green meetings.
- Travel Portland has an active Green Team that helps drive sustainable activity across all business units.

Aim two

To observe the marketing tactics subsequently employed to attract international meetings to the destination based on its green credentials.

Travel Portland's green marketing journey is perfectly summed-up in the progression of its tagline, "Isn't not easy being green", to, "It is easy to be green in Portland". This clever turn on the legendary Kermit the Frog lament encouraged local industries and organisations to remove "going green" from their too hard baskets. As sustainability has gathered momentum in the business events community, Portland has embraced green to such an extent that now simply by choosing this city for an event, it automatically ensures that the outcome will probably be greener than it otherwise would have been.

Portland's positioning as a leader in sustainable meetings is also reflected in their current advertising entitled, "A deeper shade of green". This delivers a subtle message that although other destinations have begun the green journey, Travel Portland is further along the path.

The interest of the business and corporate sectors was aroused when Travel Portland argued cogently that the greening of both organisations and industry meetings would most likely benefit bottom lines as well as the planet. This is evident in the introduction to the green meeting planners section of their website which states, "Greening your meetings isn't just good for the planet — it's a boon to your bottom line, too."

A large majority of Travel Portland's marketing strategy is public relations focused, with a dedicated green PR staff member, leveraging off the belief that a story about you told by people outside your organisation is potentially incredibly powerful. The 'rave' section on the Travel Portland website is a perfect testament to this belief.

Travel Portland's other key strategy is to perform an educational role to meeting planners. The primary reason for Travel Portland placing energy and resources

into this area is the belief in the proposition that once these planners are convinced of the merit of these green principles they will more than likely choose to have their meeting with the organisation and city which is most obviously the leader in the field, which is Portland.

Actions to follow-up

Immediate

- Email all contacts met whilst on the scholarship trip to thank them for their time and knowledge shared.

Short-term

- Make sustainability a key objective in the 2010/2011 Brisbane Marketing Convention Bureau business plan.
- Establish a Brisbane Marketing Green Team.
- Work towards Brisbane Marketing achieving green accreditation.
- Educate Brisbane Marketing staff on sustainability so they are informed and able to engage on a green level with members, stakeholders and clients.
- Gather data from members to ascertain their current green status and help support BEA's CRS audit.
- Educate members on sustainability and the importance to their business.
- Provide access to resources for members to utilise in the journey to becoming more sustainable.

Long-term

- Integrate sustainability into all Brisbane Marketing Business Unit business plans and business activity.
- Further develop Brisbane Marketing's position as an industry educator for members and clients.
- Develop marketing and PR strategy around sustainability to drive the message home.
- Engage with other industries on a green level perhaps through green team networking functions.
- Become an industry green leader across all Brisbane Marketing sectors.

Following attending the GMIC conference in Denver:

- Form a GMIC in Brisbane.
- Engage on an international level with GMIC.

- Facilitate international interaction through a buddy system.

Recommendations

Australia needs to embark on the green journey not just in the business events industry, but across all business. The positive impact on the environment, people and possibly to a business's bottom line makes sustainability a very attractive path and as evidenced through Travel Portland, the journey is not *that* difficult to start. Let's start to see Australia at the table, providing valuable input into discussions such as international green meeting industry standards etc.

Conclusion

Thank you to staff scholarship sponsors, the Association of Australian Convention Bureaux (AACB), Business Events Australia (BEA) and Qantas.

The scholarship is a wonderful initiative for Australian Convention Bureau staff. With the only parameters being that the project will support career development and bring benefit to your Bureau, almost any idea, well executed, can be considered. What an amazing opportunity.

My US trip has taken me to places I have never been, introduced me to an incredible network of people in the green sphere and enabled me to start to shape a greener landscape for business events in Brisbane.

Thank you again AACB, BEA and Qantas, without you it would not have been possible.

Thank you also to the Travel Portland team who were extremely generous with their time and willing to divulge the details of their green journey to date.

AACB members and co-sponsors are welcome to contact me for further information;

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