



**AACB 2010 Vin Barron IMEX Prize
Final Report
Deborah Lonne, Coordinator, Brisbane Marketing Convention Bureau**

Firstly, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the AACB, IMEX, Qantas and Brisbane Marketing for presenting me with this once in a lifetime opportunity to attend IMEX in Frankfurt.

IMEX is the world's largest tradeshow event for the incentive, travel and meetings industry. This year over 3,500 exhibitors from 157 countries attended the event as did 3,870 hosted buyers and 5,035 visitors. Post event reports identified an increase in attendance by long-haul buyers and also emerging destinations such as China, India, Russia and Brazil. This increase in numbers led IMEX Group Chairman, Ray Bloom to declare this year's event the most successful to date.

I commenced my career in the business events industry last year, joining the Brisbane Marketing Convention Bureau team after completing a university work experience position. The opportunity to attend IMEX at such an early stage in my career has served to fuel my passion and drive to build a successful career in the business events industry.

The whole experience from researching and writing my report, to attending IMEX, receiving my award at the Gala Dinner and presenting at the Future Leaders Forum has been such a positive and rewarding journey, and will no doubt be a highlight of my year.

I genuinely enjoyed researching and writing my paper, and felt that no matter the outcome of my submission, I was already a winner having gained such a wealth of knowledge and in depth insight into the current state of the business events industry in Australia. Attending IMEX was really just the icing on the cake.

The day prior to the commencement of IMEX, I attended the ICCA database workshop, which I found really beneficial, and provided me with some great tips to share with my team and enhance our use of the ICCA database and its leads. Attending this workshop also enabled me to network with peers from other bureaux around the world and learn some of the different ways in which they operated compared to my own bureau.

When I first entered Messe Frankfurt where IMEX is held, I couldn't help but be swept up in the buzz and excitement that filled the air as the crowds flowed into the main exhibition hall. I was in awe of the sheer size of the event, which was unlike anything I had seen before, filling a showroom of over 30,200 square metres. I spent the morning exploring the different exhibitor stands which included destinations and convention bureaux, hotel groups, airlines, PCOs and other agencies. It was fascinating exploring the different stand designs and the individual selling points each exhibitor chose to capitalise on when promoting themselves to an international market.

Throughout the three days of IMEX, a variety of educational seminars and workshops were held. In response to increase demand for green education, there was a strong focus on corporate social responsibility, sustainability and going 'green'. I used this opportunity to attend as many of these sessions as possible, some of which included:

- 'Corporate social responsibility – The success of sustainable meetings strategy' - A case study run by the Centro de Congressos de Estoril, who were the IMEX / GMIC Green Exhibitor Winner in 2009. This session explored the steps Estoril has taken to successfully

implement sustainable practices into all facets of their operations and their future plans for continuing improvement.

- 'Getting competitive advantage from culture in MICE' – Understanding how cross-cultural assumptions can impact business, and how to improve your business by becoming more culturally competent.
- 'The Green Globe standard for sustainable operation and management' – a review of industry accepted CSR criteria, the necessary steps to meet these benchmarks and case studies of Green Globe certified organisations which have successfully integrated CSR into their core business operations.

In addition to these sessions, I also attended a couple of the seminars detailing the findings of the Convention 2020 report which was commissioned by IMEX, ICCA and Fast Future Research. The aim of this report was to understand how the meetings experience could evolve over the next decade and the implications for destinations, venues, and event organisers. The findings of the report indicated that at present, many in the industry have focused on operational delivery which leaves them susceptible to external events. It projected that future success will be underpinned by an organisation's ability to understand the drivers of change, developing a strategic vision with clear long term goals and pursuing business that aligns with those goals. Other recommendations included outthinking the competition instead of out-spending them, and developing a strategic approach to technology. I especially enjoyed listening to the audience questions and answers by the presenter, Rohit Talwar.

I attended a joint press conference hosted by Brisbane Marketing and Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre (BCEC) which promoted the expansion of the Centre, set to open in 2011 and also the launch of Business Event Australia's new campaign to raise Australia's profile as a destination for international association meetings.

It was a great honour to attend the IMEX Gala dinner and be recognised for my achievement by professionals and colleagues in the industry. Australia shone in the spotlight that night with both the Gold and Silver 'Green Supplier' awards going to the Adelaide Convention Bureau and BCEC respectively.

However, **the stand out event of my time at IMEX was presenting to the Future Leaders Forum.** This audience consisted of 125 students pursuing a career in the meetings and incentive travel industry. I was also supported by my Director, Annabel Sullivan, Carla Huetta (Canberra Convention Bureau) and Alison Gardiner (BCEC) who attended. My presentation was really well received, and being the first time I had presented to an audience of that size, I felt a huge sense of personal accomplishment.

Overall, attending IMEX in this capacity presented me with a fantastic opportunity for both professional and personal development, increasing my knowledge of the business events industry whilst building contacts on both a national and international level. I strongly recommend other bureau staff to apply to have the chance to enjoy this extraordinary experience themselves.

Once again, I would like to thank the AACB, Qantas, IMEX and Brisbane Marketing for the fantastic opportunity for career development and growth attending this event has presented me with. AACB members and sponsors are invited to contact me should they seek further information:

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