



REPORT: AACB's 2009 VIN BARRON IMEX PRIZE FOR BUREAUX STAFF

Submitted by:

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Firstly, the opportunity to travel overseas and the exposure to the international meeting industry has been absolutely fantastic. I really appreciate the investment from the Association of Australian Convention Bureaux, Qantas, IMEX and Canberra Convention Bureau.

Reports following IMEX 2009 indicated, *"The event attracted a record 3,500 exhibiting companies, representing 157 countries, and was attended by more than 3,700 hosted buyers and 5,100 visitors from approximately 60 countries."* This is extravagant by any means. Exposure to an enormous and dramatically varied industry such as the meetings industry was an experience in itself.

The AACB's 2009 Vin Barron IMEX prize for bureau staff has provided me a one-in-a-million opportunity. The entire process, starting from reflecting and researching the benefits of business events to the local community, to the end which involved the delivery of my presentation to 90 students attending the Young Leaders Forum at IMEX 2009 in Frankfurt has been exceptional. This journey has provided me with a deeper understanding of the industry in which I work and the amazing contribution our efforts make to the entire community.

Attending IMEX provided an opportunity to access international meeting industry leaders through a variety of seminars, workshops and the exhibition. This allowed for significant professional development opportunities and increased industry knowledge and awareness. Some of the seminars I attended which were of most benefit included:

- Return on investment – how to effectively measure learning and professional development outcomes delivered through the means of conferences and events. How do you measure what someone has learnt or taken away from attending a conference?
- How to make your destination more attractive and competitive in the eyes of buyers – understanding what is most important to the each individual buyer, how to maintain a transparent and reliable relationship and what a destination needs to offer to enhance the experience of attending delegates who will become future advocates for the destination
- Leading your association into the future – how to survive and thrive in turbulent times. What are the forecasted global changes and how will we respond.
- Personality differences and how to identify and take advantage of these differences - a very interesting task to self review as well as understand gather an appreciation for those differences.
- Meeting architecture and future demands from associations and industry- this session explored the design and delivery of conferences and meetings and how meetings need to evolve in order to achieve business objectives and satisfy delegates.

These seminars and other networking opportunities also allowed me to gather a better understanding of the international meeting industry and expectations from a meeting organiser's perspective.

I also had the opportunity to attend an ICCA (International Congress and Convention Association) Sector meeting and ICCA Asia Pacific Chapter meeting. The Sector Meeting provided a great insight into the latest 'destination marketing' industry expectations from ICCA's recent survey. In this session it was revealed there is an international consensus and forecasted expectation:

- that the number of business events and the size of these events to remain similar
- funding for their organisations will remain consistent, however will not increase.

During the show, I found the message from exhibitors and hosted buyers alike reflected a similar predication as above. Exhibitors and hosted buyers also indicated the association and government sectors would remain in these difficult economic times, whilst the corporate market has already significantly reduced.

A select few markets within the corporate sector may remain consistent, such as certain areas of IT and pharmaceutical where there is a consistent demand for new technologies and research.

During the ICCA Asia Pacific Chapter meeting I discovered that the Asia Pacific region currently has the largest population and it is estimated that this region will become the dominate area in the world in terms of size of economy and increase in development. China and India are currently the emerging markets and are expected to be the drivers in the region. The ICCA session was not the only time I heard this predication whilst in Frankfurt. A number of seminars that were focussed on the future of the industry shared this same forecast for the Asia Pacific region.

The Future Leaders Forum presentation and Gala Dinner were one of the many highlights of my IMEX experience. As detailed above, I presented to the Future Leaders Forum which was attended by approximately 90 students. It was great to be able to share my industry knowledge and research with future European industry professionals, especially with an Australian perspective. I was greatly surprised at the end of my presentation that participants wanted to know more and ask questions.

The Gala Dinner, held at Sheraton Hotel Frankfurt, was a fantastic night for Australia with awards presented to not only me but also the Adelaide Convention Centre and Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Overall, this was a tremendous experience and I would encourage future Bureau staff to apply. I gained some great industry knowledge and took away some great professional tips. I would say for the industry, the message isn't all doom and gloom however we all the need to work smarter in order to remain attractive in such a large and competitive environment.

Thank you once again to the key sponsors of this award, the Association of Australian Convention Bureaux, Qantas and IMEX, and a special thank you to the Canberra Convention Bureau for their support and guidance.

