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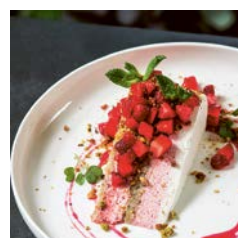
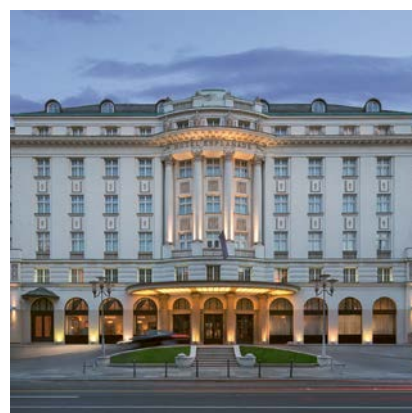
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Let's Meet in Zagreb

Zagreb, the lovely capital of Croatia, is a charming historic Central European city featuring a distinctive Mediterranean way of life. It is conveniently accessible by road and air from all parts of Europe and beyond. Moreover, the busy international Franjo Tuđman Airport is only a 25-minute ride from the city centre.

The rich culture and history, legends and tales, the old and the contemporary, are all on display as you stroll down the streets of Zagreb and are included in numerous interactive sightseeing tours. The city is conveniently compact, so most of the hotels, venues and sightseeing points are within walking distance.

The venues range from some of the most beautiful historic buildings in the romantic city core to the local heritage and international business hotels downtown. Hospitable, friendly and safe Zagreb is commonly a preferred host destination selected by many international associations and corporate clients for organising their congresses, conferences, scientific meetings, incentives and various other activities and events.

In addition to traditional venues, Zagreb also boasts a plethora of elegant urban parks, forests, lakes and green areas, making it Europe's second greenest capital city. The green areas are ideal outdoor spaces for holding sports events, picnics, concerts, shows and many more. As the city is situated on the slopes of

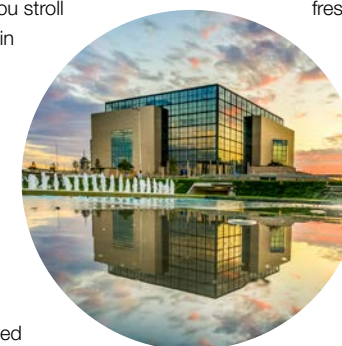
Mount Medvednica, the green lungs of the city, one can also take a cable car to reach the peak, Sijeme, or visit the medieval fortress of Medvedgrad for an interactive educational incentive.

Zagreb offers a great variety of gastronomic experiences ranging from typical local and seasonal to international dishes. They can be enjoyed in restaurants, but also in small vendors offering street food during numerous festivals all year round. Featuring daily fresh and seasonal local produce, the centrally located picturesque Dolac food market is one of most visited attractions in the city.

The Zagreb surroundings includes unspoilt nature with tranquil landscapes, romantic medieval castles and legends, wine roads, spas, hiking and cycling trails, and more. Less than a two-hour drive away is the Adriatic coast, ideal for an unforgettable incentive or a pre or a post tour. In the vicinity is also the world-famous Plitvice Lakes National Park included on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Whenever you plan your next event, consider Zagreb – the safe and vibrant Central European metropolis with Mediterranean flair, where captivating city atmosphere and making business make a perfect match.

The dedicated Zagreb Tourist Board & Convention Bureau team is at your disposal. Welcome to Zagreb, your next meetings and incentives destination.



PHOTOS: Julien Duval / Marija Gasparovic



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Business Events Sarawak Legacy Initiative

A Model Blueprint For A Sustainable Destination

Visualise a destination where business events continue beyond the closing ceremony. In Sarawak, the real impact begins long after, through initiatives designed to leave a legacy of sustainability that improves lives, empowers communities, and drives meaningful change beyond saving the planet.

Sarawak is leading the charge in driving sustainability in the business events sector through a combination of strategic initiatives, innovative frameworks, and government-backed programmes.

The business events sector is led by Business Events Sarawak, a non-profit organisation under the Sarawak government. This report outlines the sector's initiatives to create a sustainable future that balances people, planet, profit, and purpose.

PCDS 2030 and Legacy Impact Master Action Plan 2023–2025

Sarawak's business events sustainability initiatives are deeply rooted in the Post-COVID-19 Development Strategy (PCDS) 2030,

a roadmap by the Sarawak government aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals to achieve economic prosperity, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability by 2030. The PCDS 2030 is anchored on the six key economic sectors targeted for growth and supported by seven enabler sectors, creating a new standard for business events in Sarawak to take action based on local, national, and global sustainability needs and aspirations.

PCDS 2030 Six Key Economic Sectors

- Manufacturing
- Agriculture
- Tourism
- Forestry
- Mining
- Services

PCDS 2030 Seven Enabler Sectors

- Digital Transformation
- Innovation

- Education & Human Capital
- Basic Infrastructure
- Utilities
- Transport
- Renewable Energy

Business events are one of the six key economic sectors, and the PCDS 2030 goals are mirrored in the Legacy Impact Master Action Plan (Legacy MAP) 2023–2025, which measures the long-term positive outcomes of business events across five legacy areas: Sector, Economic, Community and Social, Environment, and Governance.

A component of the Legacy MAP is the Business Events Sarawak Legacy Initiative, a pioneering initiative by Business Events Sarawak to strategise and measure business events' long-term positive benefits, known as legacy impact. With the following goals:

- Sectoral Growth and Recognition
- Catalyst for Real Environmental Change
- Economic Growth for Local Communities
- Effective Collaboration and Influence on Governance
- Better Quality of Life for Malaysians

Using the Business Events Sarawak Legacy Initiative, MyCAS also collaborated with stakeholders who have a sustainability vision. This led to *BAQ2018* being hosted at Sarawak's award-winning green convention venue, Borneo Convention Centre Kuching. By making a strategic decision on the venue, MyCAS implemented green event standards covering a range of areas, such as waste management, energy efficiency, and sustainable sourcing.

What MyCAS essentially achieved through the *BAQ2018* was propelling groundbreaking sustainability standards from the grassroots to the highest levels of policymaking, demonstrating that legacies can be achieved with the right approach and collaboration.

Capacity Building and Talent Development

Sarawak's approach to sustainability in business events extends beyond environmental considerations to include social and economic dimensions. Led by Business Events Sarawak's Capacity Building Unit, one of Sarawak's strategies to sustain the Sarawakian and Malaysian industry is to invest heavily in education and capacity building. Today, over 300 industry partners from government, associations, suppliers, and academia across the country carry at least one professional certificate related to business events:

- Sustainable Events Professional Certificate
- Global Sustainable Tourism Council Sustainable Tourism Training Programme
- Certified Meeting Professional
- Certified Incentive Specialist

- Certified Event Designer
- Conference Certification Programme Plus
- Conference Management Certification Plus
- Certified in Exhibition Management
- Digital Event Strategist

Another groundbreaker was the inaugural International Congress and Convention Association Association Impact Masterclass held in April this year in Sarawak's capital city, Kuching. Sarawak firmly believes that education should be accessible to all industry players worldwide, prompting Sarawak to become the exclusive seed grant contributor and enabling destinations worldwide to equip their respective industries with legacy-building and impact-creation knowledge.

Following the success of the Kuching masterclass, Ireland stepped in as the next host of the *ICCA Association Impact Masterclass*. The collaboration between Sarawak and ICCA is sustaining the programme for destinations and associations worldwide, to enjoy and benefit from.

Sustaining the industry also requires collaborations between local colleges and universities. The industry is nurturing future talents through Business Events Sarawak by providing university scholarships for the Diploma in Event Management at UCSI University Sarawak campus. One of the recipients, Ivy Glynnis Kana, was honoured with the Dean's List Awards for three consecutive semesters and an impressive Grade Point Average of 3.80 out of 4.00.

"Receiving this scholarship has eased my family's financial burden and enabled me to explore event planning in depth. Without it, I doubt I would have been able to study here or achieve a place on the Dean's List." – Ivy Glynnis Kana, recipient of the Business Events Sarawak Scholarship.

Conclusion

By focusing on socioeconomic growth and alignment with government initiatives, Sarawak is developing a mutually beneficial ecosystem for business events and beyond. The Legacy Impact Master Action Plan 2023–2025, and its components, prove the need to recognise sustainability as a multifaceted concept where social equity and economic viability are on par with environmental protection.

In 2025, Sarawak will launch Asia's first legacy impact measurement dashboard, where planners can effectively and independently plan, monitor, and measure their legacy impact. These initiatives are aligned with the Sarawak Premier's intention of transforming the destination into the Legacy Capital of Business Events in Malaysia and Borneo by 2030, where legacy impact becomes second nature in the planning and execution of conventions, exhibitions, corporate meetings, and corporate incentives in Sarawak.



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Meetings[®] INTERNATIONAL

LEGALLY RESPONSIBLE EDITOR IN CHIEF Atti Soenarso
atti.soenarso@meetingsinternational.com

PUBLISHER Roger Kellerman
roger.kellerman@meetingsinternational.com

GLOBAL SALES DIRECTOR Graham Jones
graham.jones@meetingsinternational.com

TEXT Roger Kellerman, Atti Soenarso

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The Paris
OLYMPIC SPIRIT 2.0

IN FRANCE, especially in Paris, the run-up to the *Olympic and Paralympic Games* was one long lament about what was wrong and the disasters to come. It did not start well. On the night of the inauguration, a group of unidentified saboteurs burned cables and destroyed the train network in large parts of the country. Nearly a million people were stranded. During the inauguration ceremony itself, it rained and blew. But then something happened. As **Céline Dion**’s final note continued into the Paris night, even the negative opinions heard before the games flew away. Commentators on French television were moved to tears, and the inauguration was suddenly declared a historic success. During the following TV broadcasts, the French sang *La Marseillaise*, the national anthem, a cappella. The feeling of being at a sports-style rock concert spread from many Olympic venues around Paris.

But the remarkable 16 days of the *Olympics* were not all about sport. Paris was a crucial business event in the battle between European countries to attract head offices, factories, and research and development centres. France’s economic promoters got the chance to present themselves in the best possible light to foreign

business leaders and investors. About 500 decision makers from 43 countries were invited to Paris for the *Olympics*. During a press conference, **Valérie Pécresse**, President of Paris Region, said: “The goal is to introduce the delegates to the wealth of the Parisian ecosystem, its technological and industrial landscape, especially in key areas like health care and mobility.” To get to Institut Gustave-Roussy, one of the leading European cancer centres, the international guests rode line 14, the latest addition to the Paris metro system, and thanks to its automation, experienced the high speed. They then continued to the world’s largest fresh market in Rungis before arriving at Orly airport.

For the Paris Region, the *Olympics* was a crucial investment. The region has made significant financial commitments, aiming to accelerate the region’s economic, social, and environmental transformation. In fact, after the French government, the Paris Region is the largest sponsor of the games, underlining the event’s importance and with the insight that events create meetings, and meetings create events.

The games showcased many technical innovations, resulting from emulation between the Paris

Region and international companies that have combined their expertise to make this event memorable. These innovations in transportation, energy, digital technology, Big Data, and the Internet of Things (IoT) are a glimpse into the future, with flying cabs, autonomous vehicles running on green hydrogen, and a floating solar power plant on the Seine paving the way for the next generation of technology.

Parallel to the *Olympic Games*, the French demonstrated their ability to organise, which is not usually the impression of France from abroad. It reassures potential investors about the questions they typically ask themselves, such as whether their projects and business events can be completed on schedule.

To quote *The Washington Post*: “The *Olympics* needed a reset, merci to Paris for providing it.” We are still trying to bottle the Olympic spirit for the next four years.



PHOTO Magnus Malmberg

Swedish-Indonesian **ATTI SOENARSO** has worked as a journalist for close to 40 years. She has worked for Scandinavia’s largest daily newspaper, was TV4’s first travel editor, has written for many Swedish travel magazines and has had several international clients. She has travelled the length and breadth of the world and written about destinations, people and meetings.



The Business Events Industry CAN HELP TO CREATE A MORE PEACEFUL WORLD

THE PRESIDENT and CEO of Seoul Tourism Organization, **Ki Yon Kil**, says “Although we are successful even now, the MICE industry is still beginning its development in the Republic of Korea. The business event industry in Seoul and South Korea has great potential, so we are developing this potential of the whole business event industry. Seoul City is cooperating between politics, business tourism, and the meeting and event industry.”

Meetings International met with Ki Yon Kil and **Jin Hyeok Park**, Director of the Seoul Convention Bureau, for a conversation, knowing that ICCA statistics have put Seoul at number ten globally and second in Asia, after Singapore. And with the large and long-term investments being made in Seoul, Singapore may very well be overtaken in the coming years, as Singapore is short of land to continue expanding with new meeting facilities.

“It’s good timing for us. People love to go to new destinations, and because international buyers have already visited many European cities,

they are growing tired of going to the same places. And as European business event organisers have gone through most European destinations already, they are increasingly interested in new destinations in Asia,” says Ki Yon Kil.

“Many people outside of South Korea have an interest in K-pop, K-drama, K-cosmetics, and everything else they like about K-culture. So, they love the idea of seeing the real Korean life, and link that strategy to our business events industry.

“And from the perspective of international buyers, Seoul has 170 direct flights worldwide, and Incheon Airport is the world’s third-largest airport. We recently opened Terminal 2, so we have increased flight capacity. The amount of transit passengers at Incheon Airport, as a hub airport, is about eight million each year. And the airport on a whole sees about 60 million passengers coming through yearly.”

According to Ki Yon Kil, the main challenge in the business events industry in the Republic of Korea is

infrastructure, but Environmental, Social responsibility, and corporate Governance, ESG, are also becoming very important.

“We have made many big investments in this field. I hope people will be interested in creative ways of communication, such as ESG. It’s essential. For example, business events tend to generate a lot of waste. So these are the kinds of issues we have to take seriously. So in Seoul, we have put ESG guidelines in place for business events.

“Those kinds of things are fundamental. It also applies to our support program because organisers that implement some of the recommendations in the ESG guidelines, will receive more incentives. Another example, and another aspect, is the war between Russia and Ukraine and the Israel and Palestine war. The meetings and events industry can contribute to creating a more peaceful world.

“Tourism and the food industry are peaceful. And if the world continues to be unstable, our industry will

suffer. We should cooperate to try to alleviate these types of crises. When the wars in Ukraine and Palestine broke out, the industry shrank and declined because of them. I hope our industry can try to cooperate and try to prevent war. If so, that would protect all opportunities in the world. And I believe the business events industry could contribute to that end, and be a stabilising factor,” says Ki Yon Kil.

recycled waste paper that allows quick and easy setup. Combined in any shape and length, standalone lightbox systems illuminate booth displays and walls to help put messages in the right light. Coex’s AV Drop modular system makes it possible to quickly and easily set up impressive yet sustainable stage backdrops up to 72 metres long.

Regarding Coex’s newest sustainable venue, CEO **Dong-ki Lee** stated:

“In Seoul, we have put ESG guidelines in place for business events ... organisers that implement some of the recommendations in the ESG guidelines, will receive more incentives”

Earlier this year, the Coex Convention and Exhibition Center invited business events industry professionals in South Korea to the open house event for its newest sustainable exhibition space, The Platz. On the second floor, this latest event space features an industrial concept with a bright and open exhibition area of 2,224 square metres, a dedicated lobby and reception area of 646 square metres, and private meetings and conference rooms. Easy access to event halls on the first floor and meeting rooms on the third floor makes The Platz a space for smaller exhibitions, concurrent events, art shows, pop-ups and VIP events.

With sustainability at the forefront, all events at The Platz utilise Coex’s signature eco-friendly meeting products and solutions, branded as ‘Good Plan.’ Booths are constructed with a fully reusable modular exhibition wall system made of 100 per cent

“We created The Platz to meet the ever-increasing demands for event spaces at Coex” and that “the new event space will provide even more opportunities for smaller, newer industries to host events by reducing the barriers for entry.”

In April 2016, Seoul Metropolitan Government determined the master plan for redeveloping the Jamsil Sports Complex. The new Jamsil Sports and MICE Complex Infrastructure Development Project is divided into a public and private sector, of which the private sector will feature an integrated exhibition and convention area. Ki Yon Kil further states it is a major sustainable urban development, including a domed stadium with a capacity of over 30,000 seats, capable of hosting global sporting events. The city plans to have a four-star 300-room hotel attached to the stadium with 120 rooms overlooking the arena. The entire project

is themed ‘mega’, ‘high-tech’ and ‘eco-friendly.’

The investment will complement nearby Coex, Hyundai Motor’s Global Business Center, GBC, and Seoul Trade and Exhibition and Convention Center, SETEC, in the Gangnam district. Through creating the Jamsil complex, Seoul expects to transform the landscape of industrial and cultural consumption south of the river into an urban hub to strengthen international business exchange, leading global competitiveness by building a cluster for meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions. The total cost of this private investment project is €1,500 billion.

The surrounding area by the Han River and Tancheon Stream will be restored as part of the urban development. The plan is to connect Gangnam and Jamsil, which were grouped as international exchange complexes but were cut off by rivers, as ecological parks. For example, a natural lake is restored around the mainstream of the Han River and the Incheon waterfront. A pedestrian path is created simultaneously and will be 267 metres long.

The developments in the Jamsil district include sustainable design solutions introduced through energy efficiency systems, such as high-performing green rooftops, biotope installations of living plants and animals, a solar screening device, restoration and preservation of the former site, and utilisation of existing facilities.



IMAGE: The Brisbane Design Alliance

Northshore Vision 2050

LEGACY PLAN BEYOND THE BRISBANE 2032 OLYMPIC GAMES

AS BRISBANE, Australia, gears up for the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games, a vision for the city's future has emerged with the unveiling the Northshore Vision 2050 plan. The €3.6 billion proposal, developed by the Brisbane Design Alliance, promises to transform Brisbane's Northshore Hamilton district into a thriving hub of residential, commercial, and sports infrastructure that will leave a lasting legacy well beyond the Games.

Northshore is Queensland's largest waterfront urban renewal project, with 2.5 kilometres of river frontage. The mixed-use, sustainable precinct is a landmark urban revitalisation project contributing more than €8.5 billion to Queensland's economy.

The proposed plan addresses Brisbane's infrastructure needs for the 2032 Olympic Games without burdening taxpayers. At its core, a state-of-the-art Athletes' Village will house over 10,000 athletes during the Games, later transitioning into a vibrant residential community blending affordable and market-rate housing.

The new stadium, with a capacity of 60,000 seats, will be a centrepiece

of the Northshore area. Purpose-built for Olympic events and designed to host future cricket and Aussie Rules matches, the stadium will also feature views of the Brisbane River and the city's skyline, showcasing Brisbane's beauty and subtropical climate to a global audience. Adjacent to the stadium, an aquatic centre and wave pool will add to the district's draw as a year-round sports and entertainment hub.

Stage one will deliver the Athletes' Village, stadium, supporting facilities, hotels, restaurants, and leisure amenities. Future stages will add over 12,000 residential units, cultural and enterprise zones, and a sports science hub, solidifying Northshore as a key driver of Brisbane's long-term economic and social development.

The Brisbane Design Alliance, a consortium of global and local firms including Aurecon, Buchan, HKS, NRA Collaborative, and Nikken Sekkei, brings extensive experience in urban development and sports infrastructure, with past projects like London's Olympic Park and Sydney's Allianz Stadium. Aurecon, a key partner, has

been vital in providing engineering and advisory services. **Tim Spies**, Aurecon's Managing Director for Community and Place, emphasises the project's impact: "Northshore provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create a liveable city and region that celebrates our history, climate and lifestyle. It is an opportunity to create legacy infrastructure, including important transport connectivity well beyond the 2032 Games."

Subsequent stages over the following 15 years would integrate an additional 12,000+ residential apartments, townhouses, enterprise, innovation, cultural zones, and a specialist high-performance sports science and sports medicine zone.

The project has received strong support from businesses, sporting groups, and the local community as Brisbane prepares for its global role in the 2032 Olympic Games.

The 2032 Summer Olympics takes place from 23 July to 8 August 2032, followed by the Paralympics from 24 August to 5 September.

Global DMC Partners Results and Key Findings of Q3: **BE INDUSTRY FACES ONGOING COST CHALLENGES AND THE NEED FOR LARGER BUDGET INCREASES**

GLOBAL DMC PARTNERS, GDP, the largest global network of independent destination management companies, DMCs, and specialised event service providers, has released the results of its Q3 2024 *Meetings & Events Pulse Survey*, a report on what is currently driving decisions in the global meetings and events industry.

With 165 responses collected from June 27 through August 9, the report covers meeting and incentive budgets, cost management strategies, lead times, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, DEI, integration, sustainability practices, and industry adoption of AI tools.

The survey polled meeting and event professionals, most based in the US and Canada, with 20 per cent in the UK and Europe. Respondents were divided between corporate/direct planners (37 per cent), agency/third-party planners (40 per cent), association and independent meeting planners (23 per cent), with the 'other' category (freelancers/suppliers) approaching 0 per cent.

Key insights

- **Budget disparities worldwide** International planners may experience greater budget challenges, with only 27 per cent reporting budget increases compared to 44 per cent of US and Canadian planners.
- **Budget increases are not enough** Among those with budget increases this year, 57 per cent saw a 10–20 per cent rise, which in many cases does not even cover inflationary increases, reducing purchasing power for planners and leaves no additional budget for creative or experiential program elements.
- **Continued rising costs** Higher costs remain the top challenge for planners, holding the top spot since Q4 2022.
- **Hotels, F&B, and A/V** When it comes to working with hotels and venues, higher accommodation, food and beverage, and A/V costs are top challenges for planners.

Nearly 80 per cent struggle with accommodation rates, and over 70 per cent face higher A/V costs most or all of the time.

- **AI adoption** The business events industry has increased AI adoption substantially since the last survey at the end of 2023/early 2024. Thirty per cent of planners in the last survey reported using AI in their day-to-day lives, and now nearly half of planners say they use it frequently.

Budgets and Costs From 2023 to 2024, 39 per cent of respondents saw budget increases, while 16 per cent saw decreases, and 45 per cent reported no change. Cost increases in areas like hotels, F&B, and AV are driving the need for higher budgets. With most budgets increasing by only 10–20 per cent, these adjustments merely cover inflationary increases rather than allowing for more creative expenditures.

"Many of our clients are reporting having serious conversations with

their end-clients, CFOs, or Finance Departments regarding increasing budgets to deliver the same programs as in previous years,” says Global DMC Partners President and CEO **Catherine Chaulet**. “There has been an increase across the industry in meeting costs (hotel, F&B, AV, decor, etcetera), and all budgets have had to increase to accommodate, so we recognise that it’s an ongoing challenge we will all need to address in creative new ways.”

and allocation. Over 40 per cent of participants indicated that they have seen an increase of 11–20 per cent on F&B costs compared to two years ago. Thirty-one per cent report noticing the same increase in ground transportation costs. A quarter of respondents report an increase of 21–30 per cent in hotels/venues, food and beverage, and airfare costs.

Cost management strategies Event planners have cut back on A/V costs,

budget management, timely approval from decision makers, and contract negotiations.

Top challenges: hotels and venues Nearly 80 per cent of planners report that higher accommodation rates are a big challenge when working with hotels and venues most of the time or all the time. Over 70 per cent of planners are struggling with higher-than-expected A/V costs most of the time or all the time. Forty-two per cent report that availability (finding space and dates) is a common challenge most of the time. Over 66 per cent of planners noted that they face higher accommodation rates most of the time, and more than 70 per cent report the challenge of slow response times sometimes or most of the time.

Planning and lead times Lead times for client events continue to trend on the shorter side, as 43 per cent of planners report 4–9 months of planning, while nine per cent have experienced lead times of three months or less. Twenty-six per cent of respondents report event planning timelines of 10–12 months in advance, up from 15 per cent in the last survey, suggesting lead times might be improving.

Diversity, equity and inclusion, DEI When asked about the incorporation of DEI and accessibility elements, 26 per cent of respondents reported incorporating elements into most programs, while 18 per cent included them in every program. Aspects incorporated include initiatives that cultivate collective belonging, accessible venues, inclusive programming, agendas, and formats for all learning styles, closed captioning and sign language.

Wellness While only about a fifth of planners frequently include wellness

There were disparities between US/Canadian and international respondents, as 44 per cent of the former reported program budgets increased from 2023 to 2024, while only 27 per cent of the latter reported the same. International respondents noted that 22 per cent of budgets had decreased, while 51 per cent stayed the same. Those from the US and Canada reported that 14 per cent decreased and 43 per cent remained the same.

Rising costs Most planners report that costs have increased 10–30 per cent on average across various categories compared to two years ago. Specifically, significant cost hikes were noted in hotels/venues, food and beverage, airfare, and ground transportation. This trend highlights the growing financial pressures within the industry, impacting overall budget planning

reduced the number of days of the program, or consolidated/reduced the number of programs per year (42–46 per cent report making these types of adjustments at times) and used early contracting to save costs (32 per cent do this most of the time). Some respondents commented that tighter budgets boost efficiency and promote environmental awareness. They also increase virtual event revenue and encourage using more volunteers, car-share services, and simpler meals.

Top challenges Higher costs remain the top challenge, which has remained in the top spot since Q4 2022. Interestingly, the top five challenges are consistent across US/Canadian and international respondents, indicating that these issues are universally felt, with no significant variations between the groups. Those include availability issues,

“48 per cent of respondents report using AI tools in their day-to-day jobs, up from 30 per cent at the end of 2023”

into their programs, it is often prioritised in incentive programs.

Sustainability Responses on sustainability practices reveal disparities between the US and international responses regarding approaches and commitment. While 15 per cent of US respondents incorporate sustainability in about half of their programs, 21 per cent of the global respondents report the same. Additionally, just seven per cent of organisations in the US indicated that they integrate sustainability practices all the time or into every program, whereas 31 per cent of their international counterparts reported the same. Sustainability measures include selecting program components within walking distance, locally sourced food options, reducing plastic waste, donations to local organisations, finding ways to recycle and reuse event materials, and incorporating sustainable/CSR-focused activities. Nearly 80 per cent of planners find integrating sustainability into their programs challenging due to costs.

Use of AI tools The adoption of AI tools in the industry continues to grow, as 48 per cent of respondents report using AI tools in their

day-to-day jobs, up from 30 per cent at the end of 2023. The tools most often being used are chatbots, like ChatGPT and Copilot.

Global DMC Partners (GDP) is the largest worldwide network of independent destination management companies (DMCs) and specialised event service providers. Leveraging its exclusive partnerships, GDP provides a one-stop global solution for total event success in more than 500 destinations worldwide. An experienced, on-the-ground international sales team centralises meeting professionals’ event needs, from local DMC services to health and safety protocols, staffing, event technology, gifting, speakers and production. www.globaldmcpartners.com

Global DMOs

OPERATE WITH DYSFUNCTIONAL FUNDING MODELS

TEXT

Gary Grimmer

IF DESTINATION marketing organisations, DMOs, are to receive funds derived from private sources, there would need to be a mechanism by which the city imposes a levy or tax and then provides the resulting funding to the DMOs. That could be through a hotel tax, a district levy, or a district tax increment financing mechanism. Hotels might consider supporting a special purpose tax or levy if the proceeds were exclusively used to help build their business.

- In a sense, international destination marketing organisations operate with dysfunctional funding models.
- The big new thing in the US is Tourism or Business Improvement Districts (TIDs or BIDs).
- It is arguable that the most challenging part of forming an improvement district is the legislative part.

At a recent international conference, I stood in front of a room full of people from convention bureaux and asked them to raise their hands if they had more money than they needed. Yes, the question was rhetorical, and while a communal chuckle went up, no hands did.

Had I asked that question in the United States, there might have been a different reaction. Every year in the US, bureaux receive millions of dollars in new funding overnight. Sometimes, it's like the dog catching the car – what now?

Naturally, when a bureau gains a large funding increase, it will seek the most effective ways to invest those resources. But sometimes, the funding comes so fast that no fully developed plans exist. How is that possible? More on this later.

We tend to have the opposite problem in the rest of the world. If our convention bureaux are surprised by changes in their funding, it's usually a source of great disappointment. That's because most bureaux outside of North America operate hand-to-mouth. The government is the hand that feeds, and when governments encounter budget problems, DMOs are often first-in-line targets for cut-backs. With international DMOs, most of us “dogs” are endlessly chasing, but we never get to catch the car.

Globally, DMO funding models are irrational In a sense, international destination marketing organisations operate with dysfunctional funding

models. Bureaux are left begging for budgets yearly from politicians who don't understand or adequately value our industry. Policymakers generally don't associate quantifiable returns on investment with the promotional funding they deliver. So, it's a matter of faith that there's a correlation between sales and marketing and resulting business levels. Without strong faith, there's limited appetite for making greater investments and frequent motivations for reducing them.

Internationally, market success doesn't tend to correlate with market resourcing. It can even be so irrational that the policy calculus can be “business is so good, the destination marketing organisation doesn't need all the money they have.” After all, governments are fundamentally problem solvers. So, if there's no problem, why spend money on it?

Is America showing the way? Most convention bureaux in the US have a rational funding model called a dedicated hotel room tax. If bureaux help build visitation, the tax collections rise and their budgets grow. That all started about 50 years ago, and American convention bureaux grew

accustomed to dependable revenue streams and healthy budgets, in many cases in the tens of millions of dollars. But to return to the “hands in the room” metaphor, unless they’ve recently gotten a large boost in funding, most bureaux in the US would say they need more. After all, they do operate in an intensively competitive domestic market. So, in the past ten years, over 200 of them have figured out a way to get more.

How Boston went from an \$8 million budget one year, to \$32 million the next The key to an improvement district is that the funds can be generated from hotel guests rather than the hotels themselves. The usual funding mechanism is a one-per cent or two-per cent levy on guest stays. So, by agreeing to participate in the cooperative marketing program, hotels can benefit significantly and not even have to invest.

The hardest part of forming an improvement district is the legislative part. However, the US had a lot of success because local citizens were not being “taxed”, and the hotels helped lobby for the levy. Boston is an example of a recent new TID city. Two years ago, the bureau’s annual budget was about \$8 million. A year later, it had a TID, and its budget went to \$32 million.

Start with a few; the rest will follow

Is the TID or BID model replicable internationally? I guess that it will be a challenge. But the rest of the world might be able to follow the American example. It started with one bureau in California; the other Californian cities wanted it, and the rest of the American towns wanted it. In the US experience, once a few were accomplished, there was a massive chain reaction.

Could improvement districts be a new frontier of rational promotional funding where DMOs don’t have to do the annual dance with policymakers? Can a few global leaders start a chain reaction? If so, it would transform our industry.

Gary Grimmer is Executive Chairman and Strategic Advisor at Gaining Edge, a global consulting firm that works primarily with associations, DMOs/CBs and their stakeholders, and convention and exhibition centres. For twenty years, they advised hundreds of clients across five continents, helping them tackle industry challenges, capitalise on opportunities and achieve operational excellence. Gaining Edge has partnered with Civitas, the California-based consulting firm that supported the creation of over 200 improvement districts in the US. The goal is to help drive progressive funding policies to strengthen DMOs globally.

“The big new thing in America is Tourism or Business Improvement Districts, TIDs or BIDs”

The big new thing in America is Tourism or Business Improvement Districts, TIDs or BIDs. The concept is relatively simple. Define a district, for instance, a central tourism district or a convention precinct with many hotels around it. Work with the hotels to see if there’s an appetite for a joint promotional effort. The motivating factor is for them to increase their RevPAR. In a progressive hotel community there is usually an openness to collaborate on building a more robust business environment.

What are the advantages of a TID?

- They provide a stable funding source for tourism promotion.
- They are designed and created by those who pay the assessment.
- They are governed by those who pay the assessment.
- Funds cannot be diverted for government programs.

The key to creating an improvement district is having enabling legislation for a local municipality, state or province to implement the levy because of the practical need for a “collection authority.”

However, the other key is enabling legislation to require that the hotels that support the levy have control over the use of funds. It can be accomplished by the bill specifying where the proceeds go. Depending on local practicalities, that’s usually an independent incorporated hotel marketing alliance or a specific destination marketing organisation.

So, the joy of an improvement district is that it can generate a large and dependable revenue stream for building tourism and/or convention businesses, and the hotels don’t even have to pay for it. That’s why hotels in the US have so consistently supported these levies.

CREATING A LEGACY FOR THE FUTURE

LVIV, UKRAINE

UNBROKEN



The idea of creating the UNBROKEN rehabilitation center has its genesis when medical professionals attended a meeting in Lviv in April 2022 to discuss how they can help people injured in the war.

One hospital in Lviv has now been transformed into a modern rehabilitation center, creating a huge community of professionals to support those in dire need of help. This is just one example of how meetings can create a legacy and change the future.

LEARN MORE ABOUT CREATING LEGACIES FOR THE FUTURE

Visit lvivconvention.com.ua



Bratislava Can Become One of **EUROPE'S 20 MOST IMPORTANT BUSINESS EVENT CITIES**

BRATISLAVA is the political, cultural, and economic centre of Slovakia. People of many nations and religions, including Austrians, Bulgarians, Croats, Czechs, Germans, Hungarians, Jews, and Slovaks, have influenced the city's history. Today, the country has a population of 5.4 million.

Bratislava's service sector, a powerhouse of the city's economy, employs over 75 per cent of its population. These industries form the backbone of the city's economic landscape, including trade, banking, IT, telecommunication, and tourism. Major factories in Bratislava, such as the Slovnaft oil refinery and the Volkswagen Bratislava plant, further contribute to Slovakia's top

industries, which include: metal and metal products, food and beverages, electricity, and gas.

Services are the largest sector of the economy, but agriculture, mining, and industry remain essential employers. Slovakia produces more cars per capita than any other country, and the automobile industry accounts for many of the country's exports. Furthermore, there are eleven universities in Bratislava.

The most important issue in Bratislava's meetings and events industry is improving the city's position on the European map. Tourism still needs to be fully developed, but even now, it is a significant factor, in spite of being located in a relatively unknown

“Within ten years, we must create an international congress centre to develop Bratislava”

part of the world for most of the world’s population. There is also a desire for more congresses, events, and incentive travel. In addition, the city lacks a major convention centre, which has been on the development map for quite a while, but has yet to materialise. **Peter Petrovic**, who has extensive experience as a professional congress organiser (PCO) in Bratislava, agrees:

“Yes, it’s true. But despite the lack of a large congress centre, quite a few congresses in the city have flown under the radar for the general public. We also know that about 80 per cent of all congresses have fewer than 500 participants, and that is a size that is appropriate for Bratislava.”

The geographical location of Bratislava is special because there is no other capital city in Europe that is on the border of three countries or so close to another capital city, which is Vienna in Eastern Austria.

“I cannot imagine another European capital where you can do an incentive trip in three days in three countries, even in four, because the Czech Republic is only 40 kilometres away. It is Bratislava’s unique selling point. It’s a bit negative for the state itself to have a capital on the border

and not in the centre, but from the point of view of international tourism and business events, it’s an ideal location.”

Peter Petrovic is a partner in Guarant International, which has three partners. Two of them work from Prague, and Peter Petrovic works in Bratislava. He has worked as a PCO for 35 years.

“We were four or five people at the beginning, and today we have 50 employees. That’s quite big, even in Europe. Fifty employees and about 70 additional people work with us even if it’s not regularly.”

When we talk about the future and the development of the market in the Bratislava business events industry, Peter Petrovic sees how the market is changing.

“The generation of people that are around 30–35 years old, brings some changes to the congresses and conferences they sign up for. They don’t need to stay in the best hotels, they don’t insist on prestige, it’s not important to them.

“They like to combine entertainment and fun with science and grow up with the idea that everything should be green and sustainable, and they ask for such services. This generation prefers to attend more

events during the year. They see mobility as a value and flexibility as part of the job. In the past, the congress was the only place to exchange the latest scientific knowledge for the participants.”

But while congresses used to be primary knowledge hubs, things have started to change with regards to various discussion forums and how to develop science. The new generation has a high personal understanding of the topics at hand and can exchange ideas and thoughts via webinars and social media. They know that the networks they build at congresses are a gateway to new knowledge and creating even better networks for the future. It’s increasingly about who you want to meet at the congress or conference, and networking is sometimes more important than attending lectures.

“For example, young researchers may not be able to go to Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia for an important international congress, but both important researchers and the latest knowledge also come to Bratislava because it is closer, and costs are still important for young researchers. These young researchers from Slovakia, or even Bratislava in particular, can also get the latest information

“My vision is that the stakeholders and the politicians drive this industry forward”

and knowledge at the price of a tram ticket. This way they don’t have to pay for airfare, or even hotel accommodation, in the case of locals. The third aspect is that a congress held in Bratislava also has an important impact on local science.”

Peter Petrovic also points out the importance of having a professional PCO in the city, who understands the language and the meaning of the services needed to create a good congress, perhaps with elements of inventive experiences. The PCO needs an international network and knowledge of how the market works.

“Within ten years, we must create an international congress centre, to develop Bratislava. It would take us, metaphorically, from the local league to the Premier League. It would be a true game changer. If we had the space, the congresses would take place here without any activity against the will of the politicians. And that would be when the politicians exclaim, ‘Aha, Bratislava has a potential.’ But so far, this potential is untapped.

“My vision is that Bratislava, with a congress centre, can become one of Europe’s 20 most important business event cities because the city is very accessible. We have an international

airport. It’s not as big a city as London or Paris, but it has the charm of a smaller city, and there are no long transports here.”

According to Peter Petrovic, Bratislava is also more affordable as prices increase throughout Europe. If you compare it with Amsterdam, London, Paris, or similar cities, the train connections to the town are good in terms of sustainability. There are direct trains from Budapest to Hamburg every day, or why not take a bus here to save money?

“That could be good for future meetings in our city. We already have enough infrastructure, but we could do a better job of promoting the destination of Bratislava. I hope our city will succeed in that regard, because I can share another experience. We are preparing a conference here for 2028. And this year, two weeks ago, the current edition of that conference was in Shanghai. And when the Slovak scientists returned from China they said: ‘We were in Shanghai, but saw nothing of the city.’

“My vision is that the stakeholders and the politicians drive this industry forward. The stakeholders are already willing, and the politicians should be able to see that this industry has a far-reaching economic impact on the city

Having a Dedicated Convention Bureau with Political Support **IS A GAME CHANGER**

ENJOY SLOVAKIA DMC was started in 2003 by **Marek Farkaš** and **Maroš Borský** to make Slovakia a more prominent European destination, and generate business through marketing activities. At that time, different kinds of business events in Slovakia were a relatively new concept, and the goal of the destination management company (DMC) was to become a leader in the country for business events and incoming tourism. The DMC's philosophy, which has remained unchanged since launch, is to be experts in their destination, Slovakia, focusing on the capital Bratislava. As the company grew, it became clear that they needed an international connection in addition to their local knowledge.

The insight led the DMC to join the Ovation Global DMC network as its strategic partner in Slovakia.

According to Marek Farkaš, the strongest argument for creating events in Bratislava with their DMC is that Bratislava has great conditions for hosting a successful event: Very good flight connections via two international airports, in Vienna in Austria and Bratislava itself. It is a compact city with a well-designed urban layout, making logistics easy and providing extensive walking options. It has a rich heritage, a historic Old Town, and good infrastructure, including hotels, venues, and restaurants. It is a safe city with a mild climate, making it an all-year-round destination.

“Slovakia is among very few nations to produce virtually all of its electricity via carbon-free methods”

“Every company brings its communication style and work to each project, driven by the people behind it. Finding a partner who meets your expectations is crucial when organising an event. As a boutique-style agency, our ethos is embodied in our name; we want you to enjoy working with us in our destination,” says Marek Farkaš.

Enjoy Slovakia DMC’s most crucial question is whether they hope for political and economic stability and peace in Ukraine and the Middle East. These factors significantly influence the global financial situation, and the business event industry is highly sensitive to such issues. Stability is crucial for fostering a positive environment for business and the business events industry, ensuring steady growth and prosperity for the sector.

“The logic is clear: the more meetings and events infrastructure is built, the more valued and desirable the destination becomes, ultimately bringing more business to Bratislava. However, the presence of business events expertise, which our company plays a part in, is equally important in developing an authentic and credible destination. Our twenty years of experience provides useful advice and adds value to our customers’ events,”

says Marek Farkaš. Regarding the political understanding of the business events industry in Slovakia, he explains:

“We see a constant interest from national and local politicians in supporting our industry. Tourism and business events are recognised as vital sectors that drive economic growth. Unlike the oversaturation of tourism seen in some destinations, our focus is on the high end of the industry. The government’s commitment is evident from the establishment of a new Ministry of Tourism, which underscores a strong interest in developing our sector. In 2025, Slovakia Travel, the marketing organisation that promotes Slovakia in the tourism sphere, will exhibit for the first time at *Imex America*, presenting opportunities for events in Slovakia. We are preparing to join them in promoting our services at this destination.”

Enjoy Slovakia DMC are addressing the inbound marketing challenge of making Bratislava and Slovakia more attractive as event destinations. While there is already significant awareness of Slovakia, their goal as an experienced local DMC is to elevate Bratislava and Slovakia into desired destinations, thereby increasing the

number of high-quality events hosted there.

“And as a developed European economy, Slovakia and its people are increasingly aware of the importance of addressing the sustainability questions. With extensive hydroelectric power generation and the addition of more nuclear capacity last year, Slovakia is among very few nations to produce virtually all of its electricity via carbon-free methods, meaning that event activities here have a very light carbon footprint. The country also recently launched a nationwide deposit-based glass, aluminium and plastics recycling scheme.

“Another consideration is that Bratislava’s geographical position near the centre of Europe reduces both travel times and environmental effects of travelling to our destination, which is something that will contribute greatly to the country’s long-term sustainability legacy”, says Marek Farkaš.

“As a longstanding local business, we place considerable emphasis on the training and support of our employees and on sustaining the relationships we have developed with businesses across the country and city over the years by sharing this web of experience with our colleagues.

“We see a constant interest from national and local politicians in supporting our industry”

“We also see that there will be more interest in organising incentives and small events in Košice, Slovakia’s second-largest city, located in the east of the country. We are currently studying the local business events scene and preparing some interesting incentive products that can be offered on the east end of Slovakia.”

The Bratislava Convention Bureau, BCB, which operates under the umbrella of the Bratislava Tourist Board, plays a crucial role in promoting their destination. Having a dedicated convention bureau with political support is a game changer.

“We work closely with the Bratislava Convention Bureau and exhibit at major business events fairs. The BCB serves as a beacon, highlighting the destination’s credibility. With the convention bureau, buyers might view the destination as a serious contender for their events. We’ve experienced this first-hand when, in past years, we exhibited at *IBTM World* or *Imex* in a side-alley booth without the BCB’s anchor presence at the fair.”

Marek Farkaš’s vision, looking to the future with a five- to ten-year perspective, is to remain focused and fully briefed on what might lie in store, keeping an eye on the

development of the world through business intelligence.

“We are about to experience a generational change that will impact our industry greatly. The continent will become more socially and ecologically conscious, leading clients to prefer short-haul destinations within Europe. With changing weather patterns, resulting in milder winters here and more severe heat in the south, Central Europe, including Slovakia, is set to become increasingly attractive as a year-round destination. And we have been running our DMC for over two decades. Throughout this journey, we have faced numerous challenges, gained invaluable experience, as well as making costly mistakes. All of these experiences have compelled us to grow personally, and reinvent ourselves to adapt to changes. Despite the ups and downs, we continue to enjoy and value our work.”

Increase the Representation of Women IN LEADERSHIP ROLES

EARLIER THIS YEAR, Business Events Sydney (BE Sydney), and the PCMA Foundation released the final report of Advancing Women in Business Events, a two-part global study focusing on the advancement of women in the industry, specifically the gender disparity in leadership, despite being a female-dominated field. This foundational study will be conducted every two years to benchmark and track progress. The global survey is conducted in collaboration with PwC.

The initial findings report quantified the size of the problem globally and identified the numerous challenges that women face, including multifaceted barriers to advancement across personal, organisational, and societal levels. The comprehensive report quantifies the representation of female leaders in the business events industry relative to the global workforce. It explores possible reasons why there are so few female leaders in the C-suite and at the Board level.

The research project focused on the following areas:

- Understanding the disparity of women in leadership positions.

- Barriers that exist for women who wish to advance.
- Recommendations for overcoming barriers.
- Leadership attributes and skills critical for the future of the industry.
- Why women are ideally suited for leadership roles.
- Implications for broader Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, DEI, efforts.

“Gender equity in leadership is not a problem exclusive to our industry, but the steps we can take to shift the dial are. Everyone in our ecosystem has a role to play, from the individual to employers and as an industry. Our clients expect us to walk the talk. It is important that industry leaders lead the change now that ESG and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion have moved from a ‘nice to have’ to a business imperative,” says **Lyn Lewis-Smith**, CEO of BE Sydney.

“The business events industry is the ideal platform to demonstrate the value that women make every day, and we need to lead by example. Inclusivity and equity are not just the right things to do; they lead to greater profitability, successful organisations,

and a just society,” says **Sherrif Karamat**, CAE, PCMA and CEMA President and CEO.

As advocates for furthering the business events industry, PCMA and BE Sydney believe progress toward inclusivity is paramount to ensuring sustainability. A diverse and inclusive leadership team is not just a strategic advantage but a fundamental necessity for the industry’s continued success. By fostering an environment that values and promotes the exclusive perspectives and talents of women, we aim to set a standard for excellence and innovation. Guidelines and recommendations for bringing more women into the C-suite fold will be a meaningful contributor to industry progress and momentum.

In the executive summary of the study’s insights, we learn that the goals of the survey were to gather insights from executives about the practical actions that will advance women into leaderships roles within the business events industry. The second goal was to collect best practices based on observations and experience on what is working to advance women in the business events industry. Also, the research supported some

commonly held notions that apply to women in leadership positions across all sectors, namely, that there is a significant gap in representation among women in these roles.

According to data from LinkedIn, as reported by The World Economic Forum in their *Global Gender Gap Report 2023*, women accounted for nearly 42 per cent of the global workforce. Yet, the share of women in senior leadership positions (Direc-

an area of focus for rectifying, was the self-limiting beliefs women tend to carry about themselves vis-à-vis their male counterparts in business.

The PCMA set out to further understand the reasons why this gender gap is so pronounced in the business events industry and recommend a set of actions the community can take to make significant strides to address this inequity. The research identified consistent challenges in advancing

“The business events industry is the ideal platform to demonstrate the value that women make every day”

tor, Vice-President/VP, or C-Suite) is 32 per cent, ten percentage points lower.

A survey conducted by IBTM found that 77 per cent of people in the event management industry globally are women, yet only 16 per cent of women are represented in leadership roles. Compared to 42 per cent of women in the global workforce, generally more than double that amount (86 per cent) of meeting/event planners in the US are women, according to the career resource site Zippia. Thus, the disparity of women in the business events industry versus women in leadership positions within business events becomes particularly striking.

Another finding from the PwC study was that opportunities for career support and development opportunities are limited. Additional barriers to advancement were identified across three dimensions: personal, organisational, and societal/industrywide. The overwhelming personal distinction, and therefore

women into leadership roles within the business events industry across regions globally:

1. Achieving pay equity.
2. Flexibility in work hours as women typically bear the double burden of work and family care.
3. Lack of opportunities for career progression.
4. Shortage of diverse talent represented in the industry, particularly on leadership teams.
5. Lack of support for learning and growth, skill development, and mentoring.
6. Gender biases inhibiting women from advancing into leadership positions.
7. Women's limiting beliefs about themselves and their ability to compete for or successfully carry out leadership roles.
8. Different forms of discrimination, including gender discrimination carried out by management, colleagues, and customers/members.

Recognising the tremendous value of diversity in global corporate leadership overall, PCMA and BE Sydney stand united to achieve an ambitious goal based on the feedback gleaned from our research, summarised below. Together, as an industry, we need to raise awareness of the issue both within and outside of the business events community such that we begin to realise measurable gains in:

1. Increasing the representation of women in leadership roles.
2. Closing the gender pay gap.
3. Promoting flexible working styles, work/life balance, and family support.
4. Increasing diversity and inclusion of all marginalised groups.
5. Empowering women (removing limiting beliefs).
6. Fostering cultural and societal change that challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes.

“The global business events industry has an opportunity to be bold, to challenge the status quo, and to set forth a vision that eliminates barriers. We must be held accountable. While much is being done to support women as a result of DEI across all under-represented groups, our industry can dismantle unnecessary obstacles to help women advance into leadership roles,” says Sherrif Karamat, CAE, PCMA and CEMA President and CEO.

Download the full report with all sources:
<https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/>



IMAGE Ethiopian Airlines

Ethiopian Airlines Signs Contract FOR MEGA AIRPORT CITY

ETHIOPIA IS MOVING forward with an ambitious project to build Africa's largest airport, aiming to position itself as a central hub for international air travel on the continent. The new airport, projected to cost €5.5 billion, is set to be located in Bishoftu, approximately 45 kilometres from the capital of Addis Ababa and will significantly enhance Ethiopia's aviation infrastructure. The project is designed to accommodate the rapidly growing demand for air travel in the region and to bolster the nation's role as a key transit point for global travellers.

The new Abusera Airport facility will handle up to 100 million passengers annually. This capacity would make it the largest in Africa and one of the most significant aviation hubs worldwide. The scale of the project is comparable to some of the busiest airports globally, such as Dubai International Airport, which currently accommodates the same yearly figure.

As Ethiopian Airlines is the most lucrative African global airline, this decision is an opportunity to aid

further growth of the country's flagship air carrier. Recently, the airline revealed revenue of €6.4 billion and seating of 17 million passengers for 2023–2024, potentially generating much more. A major setback is that the airline's current hub, Bole Addis Ababa International Airport, is reaching its capacity limits, prompting the need for expanded infrastructure.

The airport city will be delivered in phases. The first phase, which will allow the site to handle 60 million passengers, is expected to be finished in 2029.

“The project will enhance connectivity, drive economic growth, and prioritise environmentally responsible practices in our country and beyond, reflecting the airline's commitment to innovation and sustainability. The new airport promises to elevate African aviation and strengthen partnerships, marking a significant advancement for the region's air travel infrastructure,” says **Mesfin Tasew**, CEO of Ethiopian Airlines' Group.

The mega airport city is a testament to grandeur, featuring a 1.1 million square metre terminal with passenger facilities, 126,190 square metre airline support facilities, and over 100,000 square metre of cargo and airport support facilities.

Tariq Al-Qanni, director of operations in Ethiopia: “We are privileged to be collaborating with Ethiopian Airlines on this visionary new airport, which will provide vital global air connectivity, accelerate economic growth in Ethiopia, and elevate Ethiopian Airlines into Africa's most strategic and most competitive aviation group.”

The new airport will provide Ethiopian Airlines with the facilities necessary to continue its expansion and compete with other major airlines in the region. Therefore, the airline has recently signed an agreement with Dar Al-Handasah Consultants, a partner with the world-renowned Zaha Hadid Architects.



PHOTO iStock.com/fongjeon356

Rethink DIGITAL SLIDE PRESENTATIONS

TEXT
Mike van der Vijver

“And could we have your slides by Friday next week? That would be lovely!”
“Oh, sorry, perhaps I forgot to tell you. I won’t be using any slides.”
(Hesitant voice): “No slides ...?”
“No.”
(Voice even more hesitant): “Are you sure?”
“Yes, positive, thank you.”
“Oh, well, should you change your mind, just let us know. We can try to be flexible about the deadline.”
I did not change my mind.

PRESENTING YOUR views or ideas to an audience has become synonymous with showing a digital slide presentation. In fact, I often hear people say that their presentation is ready when

they can forward their slideshow file to the organisers. Sorry, that’s when the real work *starts*.
I have nothing against slides; they may help visualise a presenter’s ideas. Nevertheless, I use slides as little as possible when I deliver a presentation. I have one major, and a host of minor, reasons for this. Here is the main reason: the slides distract the audience from me and my delivery. Participants must constantly change focus, shifting from the screen to me and back. I don’t want that. I want them to be with me and the message I am delivering all the way. I want to be able to steer them into a story, plant a provocative idea in their hearts, and get them to think hard about some hidden assumption lurking in their

minds. They must focus entirely on my interaction with them, and not on a screen.
As I said earlier, slides may serve a good purpose. However, I have a major objection to presenters’ and meeting organisers’ knee-jerk reactions when conceiving the programmes for any meeting or event:

If you stand up to present, you need a laptop, a beamer, and a screen.

Here are ten further reasons why I think *that* expectation requires rethinking.
1. Off the bat, showing slides creates a general expectation in audiences, which I find unwanted. Broadly speaking, that

expectation involves predictability and trotting the beaten track. If I want to surprise my audience into engagement, then the use of slides puts me at a disadvantage from the get-go. Subconsciously, slides convey: Expect the same.

- 2.** Slideshows keeps your participants in the dark. Literally. Doing that is bad for the energy in the meeting, and the connection between the stage and the audience. It’s as if people are just watching a screen with a show put on for them; which is not *about them*. I want my thoughts to float in broad daylight, and participants to bathe in that same light.
- 3.** A slideshow is linear, which is true enough, but while it can provide structure, it’s hard not to become a slave of its agenda. What you want with an audience is to gauge their response to your message, and then adjust along the way; for instance, by adding a story on the spur of the moment.
- 4.** I am not a graphic designer, so I am not great at making slides. And since I have no desire to become a graphic designer, I prefer using my precious time making my message for my audience razor-sharp instead.

- 5.** The slides, and the screen, limit movement. It’s often helpful to relinquish the central position on stage during slideshows, to stay out of the light beam. But centre stage is precisely where you should be as a presenter.
- 6.** Slides carry the inherent risk of forking over too much content. From behind your desk, you almost always get the balance wrong, resulting in clutter and information overload.
- 7.** Slides risk creating cognitive dissonance when written and spoken information clash. And forcing your participants to choose between reading slides, or concentrating on what you are saying, risks causing frustration and disengagement.
- 8.** Slides make time management more difficult. Once you start your slideshow, you *will* want to finish it. Even a little excess content squeezes the time for a productive discussion afterwards.
- 9.** The linear flow of slideshows inhibit interaction. They make it harder to respond to immediate participant feedback, and to engage in conversation with your audience, or to move back and forth based on their reactions.

- 10.** Finally, there are often technical hitches: faulty equipment, unprofessional technical crews, or incompatibility issues between application versions or IT systems (Microsoft vs Apple, for example). You name it; sooner or later, it *will* happen.

Don’t get me wrong. I am not against using visual aids, per se. And in fact, I often do produce digital slides and make them available as a handout *after* presentations. But I am against the default thinking that slide presentations are mandatory or even necessary. They are just one of many options for communicating with an audience. You should decide whether slideshows are a good option for you, based on what your presentation sets out to achieve, and how you wish to converse with your audience.

Mike van der Vijver is mastering the art of designing and facilitating effective meetings. He is also a moderator, speaker, advisor, author, and in 2003 he co-founded Mind Meeting. Furthermore, he works as an executive consultant and coach, specialising in national and organisational culture.

Business Events in Brazil IS BOOMING

TEXT

Eugene Gerden

BRAZIL HAS ALWAYS had its place in the sphere of foreign business interests, and even more so in recent years. Many global companies and corporations now consider the country an important investment destination. This, in turn, creates good conditions for growing the country's business events sector, and growing the support the local state provides for the development of the sector.

Having the status of the largest economy in the Latin American region, and being on the world's fastest-growing emerging nations list, Brazil currently provides significant growth opportunities for various domestic and foreign businesses in general. The increased current interest in the country could also be explained by the simultaneous decline of certain other big emerging nations, like Russia and Ukraine. In the case of Russia, due to its invasion of Ukraine and the associated

sanctions imposed on the country, it is simply no longer on the radar of primary foreign business investors.

According to state data, Brazil's economy shows great dynamics this year, and the business events sector is expected to end the current year with its best result since the pre-pandemic 2019. The same positive trend can also be seen in the annual results reported by the country's largest cities: São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Both cities are traditionally positioned as centres of the country's business events industry, and typically accounts for the bulk of the industry's annual revenue. For instance, the city of São Paulo, according to data from the São Paulo Turismo department, SPTuris, reports over 200 major events scheduled for the coming months alone. Out of which 126 are categorised as business events, expected to attract over 6.5 million participants.

Data from leading industry associations, among which are the Brazilian Association of Event Promoters, Abrape; the Brazil Association of Event Companies, Abeoc; and the Latin American Association of Event Management and Corporate Travel, Alagev, the meetings sector currently accounts for 4.32 per cent of Brazil's national GDP and with an annual turnover of €43 billion. In terms of

meetings industry, and according to Abrape statistics, 70 per cent of all visitors to the city typically attend various business events.

And this is just the beginning, as the Brazilian government and the local industry associations are planning to promote Brazil more actively as a significant meeting destination in Latin America and globally. Implementation of these plans will

by official statistics, as according to the Embratur Data Portal, the United States is already one of the countries that sends the most business delegates to Brazil, second only to Argentina.

“In the case of Brazil, we are the largest market for business trade fairs and congresses in Latin America, and we also have interesting products for the North American market. At *Imex America 2023*, we had partners from many countries, including both North America and Latin America. This is a critical moment for our segment, as *Imex America* manages to bring together these two strategic audiences of Embratur and the meetings sector of Brazil,” says Vaniza Schuler.

North America may be one of the top priorities for Brazil's meeting sector, but the plans don't end there. Brazil is also more actively trying to attract companies and business travellers from certain Western European markets, such as the United Kingdom and Germany, hoping they will plan meetings and conferences in Brazil.

In the meantime, Brazil's president, **Lulu da Silva**, announced the importance of developing Brazil's business events sector during the Brazil Investment Forum, the most significant event for foreign investment attraction in Latin America, which took place in November last year at Palácio Itamaraty, in the country's capital Brasília.

Brazil's tourism sector is also planning to help attract business travellers by using numerous tourism hotspots as potential sites for organising various incentive meetings and events. According to **Alexandre Nakagawa**, Advisor on Event Management and International Markets at Embratur, in earlier statements made in an interview with the Brazilian business paper *Travel2Latam*, the most promising meeting destinations

“Brazil's president, Lulu da Silva, announced the importance of developing Brazil's business events sector during the *Brazil Investment Forum*”

numbers, over 590,000 meetings and conferences are conducted in the country annually, while the growth rate of the industry vary in the range of 12 to 15 per cent per year.

The business events sector of Brazil began its rapid development in 2006 after hosting the *2006 FIFA World Cup*, and then the *2016 Summer Olympics* in Rio de Janeiro, which provided a significant driving force for the growth of the entire industry. As reported by experts of the Brazilian Association of Event Promoters, since 2006, Brazil has ranked in the world's top ten countries that hosted the most international events and meetings. That is when the process of transformation and diversification of the industry really began. Back in 2006, 25 Brazilian cities hosted international conferences, and by 2022, the number had increased to 70 cities, and is still growing. São Paulo is currently the centre of the Brazilian

also be achieved through Brazil's more active participation in various global industry exhibitions and events, raising the country's profile in the international business events arena. As part of these plans, particular attention will be paid to attracting business travellers from North America, primarily the US. One such example was *Imex America 2023*, the global business event hosted in mid-October in Las Vegas. Last year, a large delegation from Brazil attended the international event to promote the country as a global centre of business events.

As explained by **Vaniza Schuler**, senior manager of the Department of Meetings Tourism, Incentives and International Business at the Brazilian Tourist Board, Embratur, the North American business events market is currently the largest in the world and very important for Brazil. This is something backed up

“The business events sector of Brazil began its rapid development in 2006 after hosting the *2006 FIFA World Cup*”

in the country include São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Brasília, and Amazonas. But at the same time, particular attention will also be paid to Foz de Iguaçu, known for its Iguaçu Falls and its positioning as one of the potential meeting destinations in Brazil. Particular hopes are also put on Florianópolis and Porto Alegre as possible meetings industry centres in Brazil over the years to come.

Several challenges, such as the need for more infrastructure, especially for smaller Brazilian states, hampers the growth of the country's business events sector. The Brazilian government is aware of this, however, and is considering solutions to these problems. As data from Embratur states, more than 70 per cent of international tourists who arrive in Brazil use air transport. Therefore, plans for further expansion of airports and associated infrastructure is considered one of the priorities of the Brazilian government these days. As part of these plans, the level of connectivity of Brazil's largest cities will be further improved, with connections to many of the largest cities in North America along with major European cities and capitals.

In addition, plans are underway already to build more infrastructure

facilities to host industry events in different parts of the country. According to local analysts, implementing these plans requires additional support from the state, primarily in subsidies and tax exemptions.

During *III Summit Eventos Brasil*, one of the most important annual industry events in the country, **Arnaldo Nardone**, Director of the Fiexpo Exhibition Group, Montevideo, Uruguay, and a former world president of the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), said that further active growth of the industry might also be held back by rising costs, mainly with regard to accommodation and aviation. As explained by Arnaldo Nardone, creating public-private partnerships can be a way to increase competitiveness among other international meeting destinations, which are also experiencing growth these days, such as China and Asia as a whole. In Latin America, Argentina also establishes itself as a strong competitor to Brazil.

Eugene Gerden is an international freelance writer specialising on covering the global business events sector, with a particular focus on emerging nations. He has worked for several industry publications.



PHOTO David Sedleky

Global Events Are Crucial in Exchanging Knowledge and Experiences, **FOSTERING COLLABORATION AND INNOVATION**

THE MAYOR of Prague, **Bohuslav Svoboda**, is on his second term as head of the city council. His primary focus is enhancing transportation, expanding affordable housing, and improving schools and parking facilities. Reducing congestion and improving mobility would make it easier for everyone to get around the city, and increasing affordable housing is crucial to ensure all residents have suitable living spaces. And upgrading educational facilities and addressing parking issues will support the growing population and enhance the overall quality of life.

Bohuslav Svoboda is also a Czech doctor in gynaecology and obstetrics and a politician of the Civic Democratic Party. He was Mayor of Prague from 2010 to 2013, and then again from February 2023 and to this day. Since 2013, he has also been a member of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic. With this

background, Bohuslav Svoboda has naturally attended many different kinds of meetings and events. How important does he think the development of business events in Prague and the Czech Republic is?

“These events offer numerous benefits: they foster the exchange of ideas with global experts and showcase Prague as a friendly, attractive destination for international visitors. This is crucial for our local economy and enhances our city’s global reputation and cultural diversity,” says Bohuslav Svoboda, adding that politicians in Prague and the Czech Republic recognise the importance of business events.

“While all levels of government see the value of business events, we believe there is still untapped potential. As representatives of the capital city, we are committed to fully harnessing this potential to benefit Prague and the entire country.”

In addition to his four primary points aimed at enhancing practical sides of living in Prague, Bohuslav Svoboda also prioritises long-term safety and environmental issues.

“Ensuring the security of our citizens is another top priority within my portfolio. Focusing on these areas aims to move Prague forward, enhancing all residents’ quality of life and safety while fostering a sustainable urban environment.”

Sustainability and legacy are two of the leading questions in the current business events climate, and issues the Mayor’s organisation believes are crucial for the city of Prague.

“Sustainability is indeed a critical topic for Prague and the Czech Republic. We strive for a balanced approach, supporting various energy sources and defending the interests and rights of all types of transport. The question of legacy is paramount

“Politicians in Prague and the Czech Republic recognise the importance of business events”

for Prague and the country. The goal is simple: to move Prague forward and ensure we pass it on to future generations in better condition.”

According to Bohuslav Svoboda, the Prague Convention Bureau is an essential platform for the city and the Czech Republic.

“The Convention Bureau plays a crucial role in developing our meetings and conventions sector, significantly enhancing Prague’s prestige on both the European and global stages. By attracting international events, the convention bureau boosts our local economy, fosters cultural exchange, and positions Prague as a leading destination for business and professional gatherings.”

There is a significant connection between attending global congresses, building your worldwide network and achieving international recognition, for example, winning a Nobel Prize. And with his medical background Bohuslav Svoboda is no stranger to the fact.

“The Nobel Prize is a prestigious award, primarily reflecting its winners’ significant scientific, literary, political, or other impactful contributions. While I see a strong connection between attending international conventions and congresses and building

a global network, the main factor remains the outstanding achievements of the individuals. However, conferences and global events are crucial in exchanging knowledge and experiences, fostering collaboration and innovation.”

Talking about what the future might hold, Bohuslav Svoboda explains what he believes will happen in the coming five to ten years with regard to business events in Prague.

“Looking to the future, I am optimistic that Prague will become an increasingly popular destination for international meetings, conferences, and events. After a few years of meeting only online, I believe that in the coming years, we will meet more and more in person, and I will be delighted if Prague becomes a preferred destination for political representatives, experts and cultural fans worldwide.

“I also envision Prague as a city renowned not only for its rich history and culture but also for its scientific potential. A city that is friendly to both residents and visitors, offering a vibrant and inclusive environment. Above all, I am committed to ensuring that Prague remains a safe and welcoming city for everyone,” says Bohuslav Svoboda.

No Ordinary Venue

This is The CCD, an iconic building in the centre of Dublin, the home of one hundred thousand welcomes. When you choose The CCD for your event, you’re not just getting a venue. You will be warmly welcomed to a stunning and light-filled building in the heart of Dublin, a city steeped in history, culture and beauty. You will experience the best of Irish hospitality, with sustainable and locally sourced produce. When you bring your event to The CCD, your event is our event. Our team of experts will partner with you to deliver your event seamlessly and beyond your expectations.

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w: theccd.ie
e: info@theccd.ie
t: +353 1 8560000

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How to Boost Learning AND ENGAGEMENT AT YOUR EVENTS

TEXT

Scott Steinberg

WITH HYBRID event formats surging, meeting planners increasingly looking for more dynamic conference sessions, and attendees' general attention spans shrinking, event content programmers are growingly looking to implement more interactive educational opportunities. The practice of gamification, introducing game-based mechanics into learning and development efforts of every type, offers a means of addressing these needs and readily boosting audience engagement and takeaway.

To adapt to these shifting industry trends and teach audiences the skills that they need to thrive in fast-changing business environments, it's clear that new learning approaches and models are called for. Looking to meet the challenge, we've designed a new series of board games designed for play at meetings and events, including *'What's the Future of Finance?'*, *'What's the Future of Insurance?'*, and *'What's the Future of Healthcare?'*. Each one of them invites players to tackle real-world challenges (labour shortages, supply chain disruptions, etcetera) in a more approachable and exciting fashion than traditional classroom offerings. After sharing and

hosting training sessions for hundreds of brands as futurist keynote speakers, here's what we've learned about creating more impactful meetings and events from these efforts.

Human connections are critical Both event hosts and attendees always look for inviting ways to break the ice at meetings or conventions, and informal, team-based challenges allow audiences of all backgrounds, roles, and skill levels to more readily socialise and participate. Before starting to play our games, for instance, audiences are separated into tables of 5–8 persons, with chairs divvied up amongst folks from different areas of the business or larger industry, most of whom have had little, if any, prior interaction. As the play progresses, conversations and brainstorming around these tables provide a handy way to bridge the gap between generations, functions, and departments, invite everyone to participate, and present a ready excuse for conversation. Moreover, by giving everybody at the table a chance to shine and show their talents, it reminds participants that no matter how accomplished or experienced we are, we can

all learn from one another and that any given individual's practical skills may, in actuality, extend far beyond those we see them get to use in their day-to-day job role.

Hands-on learning is best Having served as futurist keynote speakers and thought leaders for thousands of brands, we're no strangers to delivering formal keynotes and masterclasses. But from an audience perspective, learning by doing and being tasked with solving realistic challenges in practical contexts vastly boosts attendee learning, takeaway, and retention far beyond anything that listening to an expert pontificate on stage for 45–90 minutes could provide. On top of that, by introducing practical constraints to interactive training exercises, such as specific scenarios to play through and time limits, participants are forced to focus on what matters most: Finding valuable ways to solve any given problem as quickly as possible. It helps sharpen convention-goers' focus and eliminates the distractions that often lead to "paralysis by analysis" in everyday environments. Likewise, engagement in meaningful activities

and interactions proves far “stickier” in the viewer’s mind, leading to lasting memories and “a-ha” moments whose impact resonates far beyond day-of-session programming.

Everyone is an innovator In the ‘What’s the Future of...?’ games, there’s no right or wrong way to solve a problem. Instead, there are many possible strategic tacks to take, and

identify emerging trends and challenge our clients to think about how these breaking developments might impact their organisation. As part of game-based learning programs, players are naturally forced to brainstorm, assess, and advance or dismiss ideas in an accelerated period. On the one hand, that requires them to distil challenges down to their base essence and think about managing

or concern often fuel new corporate ventures, pilot programs, or innovation initiatives in the future. In effect, whether they consciously realise it or not, players can examine and explore their current work and organisational scenario from fresh perspectives and may produce game-changing ideas.

That said, it’s clear that players learn best by doing, rather than simply hearing a presenter talk at them. More interactivity in training exercises helps serve as a helpful icebreaker and networking activity and creates a more welcoming atmosphere for meeting participants. Whatever training tools and strategies you use to build a conference or convention program in the future, we can’t stress enough that audiences learn most effectively from one another when given the means and methodologies to arrive at their solutions.

Hailed as the World’s Leading Business Strategist, award-winning professional speaker, management consultant, and business strategist, Scott Steinberg is the creator of ‘What’s the Future of...?’ a new series of board games that can teach anyone to be more creative, innovative, and resilient. Among today’s best-known trends experts and futurists, he’s been a strategic adviser to over 2,000 brands. He is the bestselling author of ‘The New Rules of Business Development,’ ‘Think Like a Futurist’ and ‘Make Change Work for You.’ He is President and CEO of BIZDEV: The International Association for Business Development and Strategic Partnerships. FuturistsSpeakers.com

“The journey to reach a workable approach is more important than the ultimate destination”

the journey to reach a workable approach is more important than the ultimate destination. That’s because not only does the game remind players that innovation isn’t the exclusive domain of any role or department, but every working professional can be more creative when we make a point to exercise our imagination more actively. It also actively exposes players to other people’s ways of thinking, processing ideas, and tackling problems, and by watching how others solve challenges, players can discover new strategic tools and techniques to add to their toolbox. In other words, the play reminds participants that great ideas can come from anywhere, anytime and that we all have things to learn from one another. In fact, one of the greatest joys of training sessions is watching the most junior interns and senior executives pick up hints, tips, and ideas from one another.

Asking questions is paramount Trade Secret: A futurist doesn’t predict the Future. Instead, by studying the state of the market and society, we

better-limited resources, including not just finances but also capabilities, workforce, and time. On the other hand, it causes them to get in the habit of asking more questions, more routinely, and in a more rapid-fire fashion, precisely as a professional futurist might do. In effect, the play is centred around asking more what-if questions, just as successful innovators would in a corporate setting.

Permission to experiment matters As a starting point in gameplay sessions, it may interest you to learn that we put players in charge of fictional companies and brands whose profiles look remarkably similar to their employer, minus the actual branding. This simple shift in perspective allows folks to speak up and voice ideas, insights, and opinions that may never be floated, or fly under the radar, in a more formal corporate setting. Moreover, we also ask players to whiteboard any concepts, ideas, strategies, and trends they come across or come up with as part of their discussions. On the back end, these points of interest

DXB Breaks Mid-Year Record WITH 44.9 MILLION GUESTS

DUBAI INTERNATIONAL Airport, DXB, has raised the bar on contributing to Dubai’s economy by welcoming a record 44.9 million guests during the first six months of this year.

Marking an 8 per cent year-on-year increase in guests, DXB has established its position as a globally preferred gateway, boosted by strong connectivity with key international markets, while reaffirming its central role in supporting Dubai’s economic growth.

Dubai attracted 9.31 million international visitors in the first half of 2024, reflecting its burgeoning appeal as a global hub for talent, enterprises, and investors. These figures, recently released by Dubai’s Department of Economy and Tourism, tie in closely with the growth of Dubai’s GDP, which reached €28 billion in Q1 2024, up 3.2 per cent from the previous year.

“The record-breaking performance in the first half of this year highlights our strategic importance as a global aviation hub. Dubai is at the forefront of global cities when it comes to attracting talent, businesses, and tourists from around the world, and we are proud to be the gateway to the city, driving growth and enhancing the airport experience for every guest,” says **Paul Griffiths**, CEO of Dubai Airports.

“Strong demand from key source markets such as India and the gradual but certain resurgence of markets, such as China, have been instrumental in our success. We are on track to break records with 91.8 million annual guests forecasted for 2024.”

The size and significance of Dubai International Airport’s established and growing markets, including South Asia, Western Europe, the Gulf countries, and East Asia, has played a crucial role in the airport’s continued success. In the first half of 2024, India remains DXB’s top destination country with 6.1 million passengers, while traffic from China exceeded one million passengers, representing 80 per cent year-on-year growth and a 90 per cent recovery compared to 2019. DXB’s top destination countries after India are Saudi Arabia, with 3.7 million guests; the United Kingdom, with 2.9 million guests; and Pakistan, with 2.3 million guests. Other significant markets include the United States (1.7 million guests), Russia (1.3 million), and Germany (1.3 million). The top three city destinations were London, with 1.8 million guests, Riyadh (1.6 million), and Mumbai (1.2 million).

Dubai International Airport is connected to 269 destinations across 106 countries and is served by 101 international airlines, reinforcing Dubai’s position as a leading global business and logistics hub. The total number of flight movements reached 216,000, a 7.2 per cent increase compared to the first six months of last year. The busiest month was January, with 7.9 million guests. DXB efficiently managed 39.7 million bags in the first half of the year, a 6.7 per cent year-on-year increase, marking the highest-ever baggage volume handled in the first half of the year. Ninety-two per cent of all arriving baggage was delivered to guests terminating at

DXB within 45 minutes of the aircraft arriving on the stand.

The average number of guests per aircraft movement was 213, and the load factor remained steady at 77 per cent compared to the year’s first half in 2023. Direct traffic accounted for 56 per cent of the total, witnessing a slight increase, while transfer traffic comprised 44 per cent. Meanwhile, during the second quarter of 2024, the airport saw 21.8 million guests, an increase of 7.5 per cent compared to the same period last year and total movements were recorded at 107,000.

As part of DXB’s efforts to enhance the guest experience, focusing on operational excellence and seamless travel experiences, new developments will be rolled out in the coming months. These include colour-coded car parks for easier navigation, a new signature aroma in Al Majlis to create a welcoming atmosphere befitting the VIP facility, and an advanced queue management system.

The real-time monitoring system at Dubai International Airport helps the airport anticipate and prevent queues from building up across touchpoints, ensuring a smoother and more efficient journey for all guests. During this year’s first six months, 98 per cent of guests experienced less than ten minutes of wait time at departure passport control, and the same percentage waited less than 15 minutes at arrivals passport control. Ninety-five per cent of guests at departure security screening waited less than three minutes.



IMAGE: iStock.com/DNY59

Most Companies Today ARE ONLY 80 PER CENT EFFICIENT

IN THE BOOK *Your Brain from 2008 is More Efficient than the One You Have Today*, Swedish author **Tomas Dalström** notes that the potential for distraction has exploded since smartphones, mobile broadband, and social media have increased. Add to that disruptive environments, such as offices or homes. Of course, this comes at a cost.

- Overall productivity growth has weakened in the EU and the US over a long period, especially after 2007 (International Monetary Fund).
- Productivity growth has not been this low, for this long, since before the industrial revolution, over 250 years ago.
- Only one in ten workers, on average, consider themselves highly productive despite the new technologies. In Sweden, it is four out of ten. The survey was conducted

in 21 European countries. According to a study by Microsoft, a central explanation is all the distractions that prevent us from getting into flow.

Why has it come to this? It's obvious. We have brains that work and react in a predetermined way, like nature, whether we like it or not. A rule of thumb that has evolved is: If a person's productivity decreases by six minutes per hour over ten months due to various distractions, it is equivalent to the amount an organization pays in staff costs for one month's work. An employee works for nine months but gets paid for ten.

To this must be added lost revenue of at least the same amount, which should have contributed to a company's profits and overheads. Note that this does not include the breaks we take in order to be more productive.

As a result, as stated by Tomas Dalström, most companies and organisations are only reaching 80 per cent of their potential economic viability today, if that even. Which explains why office workers are able to do five days' work in four days.

Below, he shares ten examples:

1 The Workplace A home is often compared to an office landscape, which is one of the worst kinds of office options, productivity-wise. The same goes for activity-based offices without restrictions or

productivity increased by 17 per cent when they moved their brains from an open plan/active zone to a quiet zone, and 22 per cent when they moved it from an open plan/active zone to an individual room. (*How Much Worse You Perform in a Noisy Office*. Interview with Helena Jahncke, Associate Professor of Occupational Health Science and Doctor of Psychology, and Tomas Dalström, published in the Swedish daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* April 16, 2023.)

The researchers note that the differences may be even more significant over a full working day, as

how important it is to choose." We also need to recognise that we have very different circumstances in our homes: "I have a colleague who has a kitchen table that is too small and instead works at the table out on her glass-enclosed balcony," says **Nina Wormbs**, Professor of History of Technology, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, in Stockholm, Sweden. (*Meetings International* #77, 2020).

2 Multitasking can reduce productivity by up to 40 per cent individually. It's not like switching your mobile phone's flashlight on and off. Getting back to the correct memory and processes, and getting back up to speed, always takes its time.

- Morale drops when colleagues have to cover and rescue the situation and delivery times are delayed. Conflicts, spoken or unspoken, between employees and managers, and between colleagues, increase.
- Those who frequently check their mobiles or computers during meetings end up having to ask about things they should know, as well as making more mistakes, because they are not cued in.
- Women and people over forty are more bothered than others by anyone who can't leave their mobiles alone during meetings. And the aversion increases the higher up the payscale you go.

Source: The University of Southern California, Marshall School of Business and **Travis Bradberry**, *Why Successful People Never Bring Smartphones into Meetings*, 2017.

3 Mobile phone use According to a survey, the average user checks their mobile phone every five minutes. Not long ago, a person who repeated the same

"Research shows that choosing different workplaces for different tasks is essential"

enforcement of restrictions. The percentages presented below may also provide an idea of what it might be like when someone works from home (unless in quiet isolation).

Helena Jahncke and **David Hallman** are associate professors in occupational health science affiliated with the University of Gävle, Sweden. Their groundbreaking research was quoted in *The New York Times* September 8, 2022. Their groundbreaking research concludes that the noisier different areas/rooms are, the worse we perform. In addition, movement also has a cost.

The professors found that when the task requires employee concentration and focus, employee

the tests were limited to ten minutes per person. And that is a reasonable assumption given that, for example, the frontal lobe (the most intelligent part of the brain) and the prefrontal cortex (the brain's control and decision-making centre) lose efficiency from repeated distractions. In other words, research shows that choosing different workplaces for different tasks is essential, which most people do not do enough of.

In a previous *Meetings International* interview Tomas Dalström did with Helena Jahncke (*Meetings International* #72, 2018), she stated that employees must "receive training on how to think and choose suitable workplaces for a task, and

"Employee productivity increased by 17 per cent when they moved their brains from an open plan/active zone to a quiet zone"

behaviour that often would have been diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder and prescribed medication and therapy. But today, this behaviour is simply considered the new normal (*Your Brain from 2008 is More Efficient than the One You Have Today*, Tomas Dalström, 2017).

People check their gadgets to see if something has happened or because they want something to happen. If you check too often, the process kidnaps your brain and reprograms it, making your brain constantly demand new dopamine showers. This was explained by **Lars Olson** in an interview published in *Meetings International*. He is a professor of neurobiology at the Department of Neuroscience at Karolinska Institutet and a member of the Karolinska Institutet's Nobel Assembly, which decides on the winners of the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. (*Meetings International* #66, 2016.)

During his career at the Bank of England, **Dan Nixon** wrote the following in one of his essays: "The world economy's problem may, in fact, be an attention crisis. It is consistent with the global spread of the smartphone." (*Is the economy suffering from the crisis of attention?* Bank Underground, 2017.)

4 "Employers in the EU" reports getting skilled people, but perhaps not the most loyal ones, which suggests employers are not entirely satisfied. They think there is a little too much talking and too much focus on other things," says **Henrietta Huzell**, a Swedish labour market researcher at Karlstad University in an interview in *Meetings International* #52, 2012. In 2017, she stated that it was still valid.

5 Other explanations Some people enjoy working from home because it solves their life puzzles. But enjoyment is not always synonymous with efficiency. Managers need to implement performance targets, support, and follow-up. If all the pieces are not in place, remote work risks negative consequences for both parties.

Different personal characteristics affect us. Those who are good at planning their lives, continue to be goal-orientated and plan well even digitally. While those who are more anxious and impulsive prefer to gamble at online casinos, read blogs or hang out on social media. (**John Magnus Roos**, PhD in psychology and researcher, University of Gothenburg. *Forskning.se*, 23 June 2021.)

6 A person who offers online genealogy research said that he has most visitors during working hours. It is quieter on Friday afternoons, evenings and weekends, and most visitors are between 45 and 65 years old. (Source: Email conversation with **Jan Granath**, who has created a genealogy course. He is a Professor Emeritus of Architecture at Chalmers University of Technology, a Visiting Professor of Facilities Management at Hong Kong Polytechnic University and a Visiting Professor at the University of Michigan.)

7 Research According to research, the average worker spends more than two hours and thirty minutes daily on social platforms (*Forbes*, 2023). Short mental breaks during working hours are necessary for us to utilise the full potential of our brains. But this often involves hijacked reward systems and constantly demanding new dopamine doses. For many, this results in overtime and less time for recovery. And, of course, this also applies when working from home. It can mean overtime and less time for recovery (*Your Brain from 2008 is More Efficient than the One You Have Today*, Tomas Dalström, 2017).

“The average worker spends more than two hours and thirty minutes daily on social platforms”

8 **Survey** A Netflix survey published in *The New York Times* 2017 showed that 37 per cent of Americans watch TV at work, while a 2019 survey showed that 42 per cent of people in the UK watch TV at work (CordCutting.com 2022).

- Eighty-two per cent of people working remotely in the UK watch TV from home an average of two hours of the working day. (*The Times*, 2024.)
- Sixty per cent of remote workers say watching TV while working helps them concentrate. Thirty-five per cent of those who work in the office say the same thing (CordCutting.com, 2022).

This claim is on par with the idea that the earth is flat. Research unequivocally shows that productivity decreases when we consciously try to achieve more than one thing simultaneously (also known as multitasking).

9 **The importance of knowledge** Experience shows that employees often do not realise that they are being disrupted. They don't understand when, where and how to work to use their brain's full potential, or why. Nor how or why different distractions affect the outcome of what employees do.

Ulf Ziegler founded MFJ, one of Sweden's most successful animation studios with major international companies as clients, and he was the studio's CEO for 30 years. He explains what it takes to run a business:

Running a cutting-edge company requires you to be efficient and create an attractive workplace to hire and retain the most competent people. I had conversations, time and time again, with employees who were watching films or social media while working. It resulted in lower quality and more work and affected our profitability. The conversations often ended in conflict. Other CEOs I spoke to had the same experience. You need to be able to draw on research to make your point.”

10 **A management issue** Managing a company or an organisation today is complicated. We live daily with the disadvantages and, of course, the advantages of mobile broadband, smartphones and social media. Today, the top question on every management team's agenda is: How should we work? In the office? Remotely? Amidst the ever-changing landscape, there's one constant factor: the brain. It's a critical element to consider

when determining how your people will work and study, and it's becoming increasingly crucial to achieve your goals. Only management can make things work better. It's not simply about working more; it's about using the brain smartly. And on a personal level, the payoff can be less stress, better grades, the job of your dreams, or a weekend away with loved ones. What you know, you can change.

Tomas Dalström is a behavioural scientist, speaker, writer and author. He lectures and educates people based on research on the brain. He interviewed 50 researchers and other specialists and read research reports and articles. The result is the book “Your Brain from 2008 is More Efficient than the One You Have Today”, which was developed into the Cognicopter, an online training programme he cocreated with Ulf Ziegler. (Find out more at cognicopter.com)

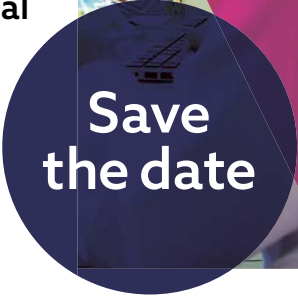


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PHOTO Sara Appelgren

ROGER KELLERMAN *Publisher, business intelligence analyst, trend creator, educator and networker. Has over 40 years' experience of the global meeting industry. Founder of Mötesindustriveckan. twitter.com/thekellerman*

When Content No Longer Matters, IS ANALYTICS THE NEW RELIGION?

DURING MY 40 YEARS as a producer of business events magazines, it's been quite rare to meet destinations – be it local, national or international – with a forward-thinking spirit that truly embraces differentiating between karaoke regurgitations and well-written original articles, between amateurish slideshow-style layouts and world-class magazine spreads, between everyday smartphone images and photographic excellence. I find this lack of distinction between the extremes strange.

We recently received an email from a destination we are more than happy to continue working with. They sent us an online survey that they wanted us to participate in, and of course, we gladly obliged. It's just that there was something important missing from the survey. There was no focus on content. Instead, every question was based solely on metrics.

Topically, we were asked if we use AI. And what editorial office doesn't, these days? So yes, we do transcription with Cockatoo, translation with DeepL, and text editing with the help of Grammarly. On top of that, AI from Topaz Labs and Adobe also helps with various image-processing tasks. These are all good tools, constantly evolving, but we are just using these services to aid us with certain aspects of an overall process. We don't use AI for actually writing the articles or

otherwise creating original content, only to assist us with shaping said content in certain ways. And some might say that's kind of an important distinction, worthy of some exploration or nuance, even in an online survey.

— *Do you use AI?*
— *Well, sure, for some aspects of our work. For example, we ...*
— *Your honour, please instruct all witnesses to restrict themselves to 'yes' or 'no' answers only.*

Done, move on.

The survey had no questions, whatsoever, regarding the actual content we create, or even what type of content we can deliver. Not a single one. Not a single time. Nada. This in turn begs the question: Why do measurement and data now appear to be so much more important than the actual content that the metrics stem from?

Why do so few destinations appear to care about what or how we write, or how the writing affects the readers, or which particular readers the writing affects, and instead focus mainly on measuring how *many* people read what we write? And why do so few destinations use their own channels to, in turn, distribute the content we produce for or about them?

Maybe it's because they don't have very active channels of their own, and are therefore looking for third parties

to fill the void. Or perhaps they do, but simply don't track their channels and therefore look to others to supply the data, or at least supplemental data. Regardless, it's sadly all too easy to get a feeling that too many prioritise quantity over quality.

If analytics is the new religion of choice, why is it more important to show how *many* contacts you have made than *who* you have made *what kind* of contact with? In business, surely the one *right* contact is more important than any number of irrelevant ones?

Don't get me wrong, we too agree that big data is essential, it's just that there are more important things, and steps, than merely generating an abundance of data that we then need help making any true sense of. Could it be that while statistics and big data are major selling points for media agencies, their clients don't always know what to make of the information, or even that the clients find that making good use of the amassed data is proving a far more challenging task than collecting it in the first place?

We strongly feel it's time for content to reclaim its rightful position as the true ruler on the throne. As social media grows increasingly antisocial and its level of commentary keeps plummeting, perhaps it's time to remind buyers and readers what quality content looks like.

Bring your heart for HLTH.

We'll do the same

Rich Scarfo
President – HLTH, Inc.

Driving Healthcare Innovation Across Europe

The iconic RAI Amsterdam recently hosted a groundbreaking event aimed at transforming healthcare innovation in Europe: HLTH Europe. Rich Scarfo, President of HLTH, underscored Amsterdam's appeal for hosting such an important event. The city's accessibility, green initiatives, unique convention centre and vibrant cultural scene were key factors in the decision to hold the event there. "It's a city that people very much enjoy visiting," Rich noted, emphasizing Amsterdam's reputation as an attractive destination for global gatherings.

An inaugural event goes above & beyond

The inaugural HLTH Europe drew over 3,500 attendees from 67 countries, including a substantial representation from top-level executives and leaders across



the healthcare ecosystem. In its first year, the event's success positioned HLTH Europe as the largest innovation event in Europe, solidifying Amsterdam's role as a prominent hub for international healthcare dialogue.

Rich articulated HLTH's vision for their events goes beyond the traditional conference format and that was certainly evident throughout the inaugural HLTH Europe. "We aimed to deliver not just an outstanding business model and industry platform, but also an event that was experiential, fun, and unique," he explained. This approach was noticeable in the event's design, which integrated creative and colourful touches, innovative business opportunities with experiential stages and other elements throughout. Attendees were treated to morning runs and yoga sessions, access to

bicycles to easily navigate the city, and evening events at iconic locations like the Amsterdam Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art and Design and the lively Westerpark. "We wanted to create an environment where attendees felt comfortable and relaxed," Rich noted, underscoring the importance of fostering meaningful interactions beyond the typical work-related conversation.

Setting the stage for future growth

Looking forward, HLTH has committed to Amsterdam for a total of five years, signalling a long-term partnership aimed at fostering continued growth and innovation. Rich expressed confidence in Amsterdam's ability to evolve alongside HLTH's vision. "The RAI and Amsterdam delivered on every aspect of what we were expecting," he remarked, highlighting the venue's pivotal role in the event's rapid success.



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