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A portrait of Sherrie Karamat, a middle-aged man with grey hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and blue tie. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred indoor setting with warm lighting.

SHERRIE
KARAMAT

CEO, PCMA

“Business events is a
metaindustry that has
an impact on all other
industries”

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Dongdaemun Design Plaza in Seoul



Seoul

A City of Sustainable Transformations

Seoul has a history of being a capital city for 600 consecutive years starting its history about two thousand years back. Unlike the former names of the city, Seoul still embraces the heritage values of much historical architecture such as five magnificent palaces at the heart of the city, ancient tombs, and the Seoul Fortress Wall. The city also stands as a metropolitan city where countless skyscrapers became the home of international enterprises well-known to the global society. Consequently, one can imagine how familiar the city is when it comes to a transformation.

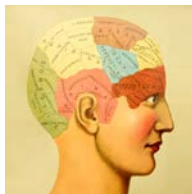
It was natural for Seoul to respond to the pandemic in a unique and effective way since the city knows how to sustain the value of old while creating pioneering solutions. The destination marketing moved onto on a virtual platform named the Virtual Seoul platform. This 3D graphic map with essential representative charms of MICE industry was followed by a virtual promotional booth for international conferences organized online or in a hybrid format. A simple click now opens a land of vast information on the Seoul MICE industry. These developments accompanied by a series of online marketing campaigns inviting the Seoul MICE Alliance to move forward together. This collective passion united

Seoul's MICE industry and was recognized by the Best Marketing Award from ICCA in 2020.



The most recent digital transformation is even more stimulating. A teambuilding program titled the Virtual Seoul Playground was introduced. It is a metaverse where MICE participants become avatars enjoying three different games with an authentic cultural background. Not only did the major allure undergo the transformation, but also the quarantine measures advanced itself with the cutting-edge technology. Participants are safeguarded against the novel virus in the course of registration to the exit. There are supports prepared for the safety and success of on-site events like disinfecting venue, renting thermal imaging devices and distributing personal hygiene kits. A Reassuring package can provide comfort to MICE participants with various insurances and language services as the name suggests.

Seoul has been known as a fast-changing city to the global society. The dynamic energy did not stop during the pandemic. This global MICE destination will be filled with hybrid synergy coming from sustainable transformations in virtual and on-site to take the business event to the new normal era.



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Boost Your Brain WITH FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS

WHEN SHERRIF Karamat introduces the term metaindustry as an expression of what business events are about, he says that meetings and events influence and develop all other industries. These are powerful words. However, Covid-19 has made us have to do things very differently, digitally, online, and now we focus on why we gather, why we need events and how much work needs to be done.

Why have we not previously concluded that the meeting and event industry is a metaindustry, and why have we not had the representatives of the business event industry in a stronger position all over the world?

We have been writing about neuroscience, meeting psychology and its impact on our meetings for many years. Yet, nowhere else is its impact greater than at the personal meeting, face to face.

According to a German study that ended earlier this year, our brains form stronger connections in a personal meeting instead of indirect forms of contact. The study was conducted at Friedrich Schiller University Jena in Germany and started in February 2019.

Neuroscientists Géza Gergely Ambrus, Gyula Kovács and their

colleagues were interested in getting to know new people in different situations.

Since the pandemic started, many have become acquainted only by video chat. From the neuroscience perspective, this leads to some exciting questions about how our brain perceives different ways of interacting online and offline.

To dig deeper into this phenomenon, the researchers separated the study participants into three groups. Each group got in touch with two new people in different ways: personal interaction by chatting with laboratory technicians; perceptual exposure, through an identity sorting game with still images; and exposure from the media, from watching a TV show.

The strength of people's familiarity with each other, called the familiarity effect, was linked to how participants learned the new faces. Personal interaction made the most substantial difference, followed by media exposure. Perceptual exposure had little or no effect at all.

Researchers recorded participants' brain activity with an electroencephalogram (EEG), a device that detects electrical activity in the brain.

They took the readings twice before the participants became acquainted with the new people and once afterwards. In all three groups, the second EEG reading revealed a clear pattern of brain activity approximately 400 milliseconds after participants saw the now-familiar faces.

The face-to-face interaction provided the strongest contacts, although participants spent less time in real life than the media exposure group: The personal interaction group chatted with lab technicians for three hours, while the media exposure group watched 20 hours of video.

The meeting and event industry is a metaindustry precisely because the face-to-face meeting creates the important contacts, the ones we carry with us in our working life, but of course also in our private life.

So now we take the next step. We are now returning to the human encounter between us, thus increasing the insights that the meeting and event industry is a metaindustry that will continue to change and develop the world in the future.



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.





KARAMAT

TEXT

Kerstin Holm

PHOTO

Jacob Slaton



Sherrif Karamat is President and CEO of PCMA, the Professional Convention Management Association. Many people consider the organisation to be among the most recognised network of business events strategists.

PCMA HAS 8,400 professional and student members and a global audience of over 100,000 business event stakeholders spread across North America, Europe, the Middle East and Asia. With 17 chapters and activities in 40 countries, PCMA is the global leader in business events. Their headquarters are in Chicago.

“A lot has changed during the pandemic. But one thing has become abundantly clear: The important part that meetings and events play in solving complex issues around the world. Now is the time to realise that the meetings and event industry, or business events as it is increasingly called globally, is a metaindustry that has an impact on all other industries.”

Sheriff Karamat says that the pandemic has made us do things differently. We now must focus on why we meet and why events such as

congresses are needed. There is a lot of work that needs to be done, and the challenges are many.

“This gives us a great opportunity to really show what business events can mean for social and economic progress. Today, more and more leading people in the world are seeing the amount of energy we put into organising congresses and other events. We solve the problems we face and show what it means.”

A popular discussion taking place globally is that business events are global platforms. They do not differ much between countries or at city, national and regional level. Sheriff Karamat feels it is important to take advantage of the opportunities generated by the policy platforms. Partly to spread the message to governments and decision-makers, and partly to stakeholders in the priority key

“Now is the time to realise that the meetings and event industry is a metaindustry”

sectors of each country and at varying levels.

“Words and expressions used in professional contexts often change over time. Are metaindustry, business events and policy platforms useful terms? Legacy, as in the legacy that a congress, for example, leaves behind, is another term that has been used for several years.

“Words are meaningful. When it comes to legacy, I usually focus on the word result. Legacy has long been an important word in our industry without us being able to talk about and implement what we mean. I think it is time to talk about results as we change and adapt.

“I use the word result because the change in words is of great significance in the narrative you want to put across. When it comes to legacy, we should look at the business events to be implemented and, during the evaluation, follow up on what actually got done.”

Sheriff Karamat calls for better evaluations of completed business events. What has been done before? But even focusing on how we conduct meetings as we do, the real purpose of the meeting is too easily forgotten. What Sherrif Karamat is saying, and what more and more people

are trying to do, is to use the policy platforms for business events to drive economic and social development.

“We have no exact time for when we have implemented what. This will be a continuous journey because as soon as we have taken the next step and made more stakeholders realise the importance of business events for the development of our global societies, we must continue to pursue our new goals even better. We have talked about legacy for many years, but I am not sure the man on the street really understands the meaning of legacy and its impact on our meetings and events. Is it even the right word to use? If legacy points to the future, then is it something we have lost along the way?”

Sherrif Karamat underlines the significance and power of words:

“Words are extremely powerful in how we put across what we want to say. Legacy is a meaningful word, but I think it emphasises the past. We must position our questions on future growth and continue to look forward. When you talk to a younger person, they tend to think that legacy, heritage, is mainly talked about by older people. It is important to present ideas and thoughts positively, forward-looking, and talk about impacts





“Legacy has long been an important word in our industry without us being able to talk about and implement what we mean”

and results from a future focus. Yesterday was yesterday, and you cannot change that.

“We are here today and are heading into the future, so we focus on how we can change today and tomorrow for our country and our citizens. Seen in context, it is about building for the future. It is about the here and now. We cannot change what has happened, but we can learn from history. We can build on that knowledge and move on.

“Although the term legacy is good, our perspective should be geared to future issues, such as results. How do we achieve short-term and long-term positive effects? At present, I, unfortunately, think that companies and organisations are similar in terms of knowledge. They are not very good at formulating the exact value of what they commit to through a business event when it comes to results.”

He continues this line of reasoning and says that if we focus on these events’ results, we must acquire correct measurement tools over time. If we do, we will see a completely different story from different perspectives, and it encourages more business events to push economic growth.

“Everyone knows that business events promote human contacts and

bring together people who can solve complex issues face-to-face. You cannot do that in the same way by staring at screens around the world, even though technically there are better and better solutions there as well. Business relationships benefit from meeting face-to-face and make it easier to do business online. I am very positive about developing the digital meetings economy. I think it has a rightful place in a business event, but it is the combination of face-to-face meetings, digital or hybrid meetings and offline meetings that produce the results we are looking for.”

Sherrif Karamat explains that he sees a grocery shop as a live event and online shopping as a digital experience. They are two very different events.

“Sometimes you get the same result, or you get an experience where you pick your vegetables, fruit and meat. You can also let someone else do it for you. That is another experience, but you can get the result you are looking for based on the channel you choose.”

Climate change and sustainability are other subjects that Sherrif Karamat has spoken about in different contexts. Many stakeholders talk about the importance of sustainable

**“We must position our questions on future growth and continue to look forward ...
We cannot change what has happened,
but we can learn from history”**

events. Some destinations see it as not using plastic straws. Otherwise, the event is implemented as it always has been.

“Making a noticeable difference to climate change takes more than just modifying behaviour. Let me use an analogy about people who go on a diet. They can lose ten or twenty kilos only to put it all back on again in a few months. It isn’t easy to stick to a strict diet.

“The reality is that climate change is an enormous threat to all of us on the planet. We must deal with it, but we will not achieve anything as an industry by thinking we solve the problem by removing plastic drinking straws. Of course, it may help a tiny bit, but we need to realise that people need personal contacts. We are explorers and continue to travel. Therefore, we must form questions and answers that make it possible.”

Sheriff Karamat explains that it can be, for example, the type of aircraft we design and build, and the materials and fuel used. It is also about the kinds of cars we drive and their emissions. The sort of initiatives that make a massive difference to climate change. And it is vitally important to talk about and develop sustainability, such as working

for renewable energy, to take one example.

“We can change things for the better, but to demand that people stop travelling is wishful thinking. It is not particularly sustainable either, as I see it. We are people and always want to develop. New illnesses are treated with new medicines, and we face new challenges the whole time.

“Business events play a pivotal role in creating a better world. Let us now make sure that we continue to develop this important issue where we bring people together to solve complex issues and contribute to understanding different cultures and humanity in the world. It never ends. You and I develop. We are strengthened in our thinking and need to come together to understand how our thinking has developed.”







PHOTO Sara Appelgren

HANS GORDON, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Authorised Psychologist, specialised in Aviation Psychology. Authorised psychotherapist, since 1987 running *Gordon Consulting*. Has for decades been engaged by airline companies, among them SAS and Thai Airways International.

On What Do We Build Our Knowledge AND ON WHAT DO WE BASE OUR BELIEFS?



Conspiracy theorists do not expect people to find their theories credible so put a lot of effort into finding evidence. They see themselves as researchers or journalists and imitate academic science with their notes and quotes. Yet by doing so they violate the basic principles of science and journalism. They lack objectivity and impartiality; source criticism is substandard, and the collection of facts is selective. Scientific methodology is based on being able to prove a theory and being prepared to review it or reject it should the facts prove otherwise”

From *Allt är en konspiration* (“It’s All a Conspiracy”) by **KENT WERNE**

HOMININS HAVE existed on our planet for over two million years, not an exceptionally long period considering that the Earth was formed some four and a half billion years ago. Contemporary evolutionary biology has shown that the human species, to which both you and I belong, known as Homo Sapiens (Latin: wise man), came into being around 200,000 years ago. The place of origin has

been traced to East Africa, from where Homo Sapiens spread out, first via the Arabian Peninsula and later via Asia and large parts of Europe. There were many human species, but they have all been extinct for tens of thousands of years.

How do we know this? Are we sure that this is what happened? Can we put our trust in the research field known as evolutionary biology? Or, to

put it another way: how do we know what really exists and what can be rubber stamped as being true? How does real knowledge about life, us included, arise?

There are many reasons to view the former human species and their successor, *Homo Sapiens*, as the animals they were (and those we still are). These predecessors and the species we belong to were programmed

inventing gods who control everything. For centuries, these myths have been honed and sharpened and put into holy scriptures that are taught in churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples.

I return to the question of the nature of reality, namely what is true and what can be described as false or unproven? It was during antiquity in Greece and the surrounding areas

experiential observations are based on two or more people making observations of the same phenomenon or object and reaching consensus on what they have observed. Usually, they obtain sufficient information to establish that they possess knowledge of the subject. Three people tell it as they see it: When walking through a forest we came to a meadow, and on the other side of the meadow there was a hill rising through another section of forest, and on that hill, there were chanterelles growing under the trees. Consensus and a detailed description usually suffice to establish knowledge. Where the chanterelles are growing is now common knowledge and, as there is no cause to doubt, we rubber stamp it as the truth.

However, there is reason to pause and reflect on this observation. Did the three observers make their observations together simultaneously or did they act independently at different times and come to the same conclusion? If they acted together, how did they make their detailed observations? Could it be that one of the three from a distance saw what they perceived as chanterelles, whereupon with strong conviction in their voice they asked the other two if they could also see them from that distance or did all three go up the hill to take a closer look at the mushrooms, if indeed they were mushrooms and not something else like yellowed leaves?

This sounds like something the judiciary usually has to deal with. On what do witnesses base their observations, exactly how did these arise, were those involved influenced in any way, etc.? A court uses free admission of evidence, which in practice means that the court assesses all existing collaborative events and observations as well as any “harder” facts, such as DNA, fingerprints, and

“Even in our so-called enlightened age, there are millions, probably billions, of people who, for various reasons, shy away from evidence-based scientific studies”

with two reactions to what they encountered and confronted: *Fight* and *Flight*. Fight or flight or both, as with most creatures on our planet. Either perish and be eaten by predators or fight and sharpen our predatory skills. We became adept at the latter and have managed to survive as a species. We also quickly surpassed the ancestors of our species in intellectual abilities. One of the main building blocks for our *smartness* was the development of a relatively advanced language and with it advanced communicative ability that enabled us to question things relatively early and form answers.

Why does the earth move under our feet? What is it that shines in the night sky? What is the thunderous noise in the sky before heavy rainfall? Why does wind blow from all directions? The answers were fetched from what we today call primitive religiously coloured notions. To this day, humankind has been adept at

that the intellectual debates first took place that came to be termed philosophy. Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle were the big three of early Greek philosophy, and contemporary philosophers have taken up the baton by asking new questions and turning every stone in their quest of true facts and knowledge. Religions persist, however, and within their framework, perceptions are still preached that do not always concord with the ideologies of our contemporary knowledge society.

How is this thing we call knowledge and knowing any different to our beliefs? Knowledge generally arises from two different processes: one based on *experiential observations* and the other on elaborate *scientific experiments and studies*. The latter is generally known as *evidence or evidence-based*, meaning that proven facts processed through diligent research should be regarded as accepted knowledge. Purely

**“They prefer to *believe* rather than *know*.
Why is that? ... Belief can heal and bring comfort
and hope, especially in difficult times”**

the like. For most of us, some experiential observations seem unreliable and raise doubts over the knowledge in question.

For observations to be labelled as scientific, a special methodological process is usually required carried out by one or more trained researchers, who base their theory on the prevailing conditions from which they formulate hypotheses in the form of assertions, for example, if A is in a certain way and you add Y to A you get the Z effect. The hypotheses are tested repeatedly in different ways, occasionally using simulation models. Experiments performed in real life or in laboratories are commonplace, and several subjects are needed to ascertain the generalisability and sustainability of the findings. New hypotheses are often put forward with the intention of improving on previous hypotheses and are also tested repeatedly. Special reviewers attend research programmes with the task of finding methodological errors and theoretical flaws. When the findings point to statistical certainty (clear significance, for example, free from random impact), a basis for *scientifically based knowledge* has been

achieved. It has been tested, thoroughly researched and documented, and, most importantly, undergone intense critical scrutiny.

Today we *know* unequivocally that the northern lights, Aurora borealis, and the southern lights, Aurora australis, are not the work of some mythical god in the sky for the sole purpose of spreading fear and doom and gloom among the people below, but something that occurs when charged particles (usually electrons) from the sun (solar wind) fall into the upper part of the Earth's atmosphere at an altitude of 100–400 km. When these charged particles collide with atoms and molecules in the Earth's magnetic field, their energy level rises. After a short while the energy is released, and the particles emit light in strong colours.

We *know* this today in the same way that we *know* that the Earth is round and that the continental plates that form the material basis for what we call land and seabed are continuously moving. We also know that extensive medically substantiated vaccination programmes have wiped out deadly diseases such as measles, polio and smallpox and given millions

upon millions of people a longer life (although minor bubbles of infection may appear on occasion).

From experience we also know that even in our so-called enlightened age, there are millions, probably billions, of people who, for various reasons, shy away from evidence-based scientific studies. They prefer to *believe* rather than *know*. Why is that? The answer is complex.

Firstly, we humans could be described as cultural beings. Throughout the ages, prophets and preachers have spread their gospels of truth, pointing us in the direction of the “correct” authority figure to follow, visible or invisible, to do right for us. Their teachings seldom emanate from any scientific knowledge base. They simply follow what has been handed down to them or been forced upon them about spirits, gods, and demons from which they set up explanatory models to quench our thirst for understanding and our equally great need for something or someone to guide us through our often conflict-ridden and strenuous life journey. In many ways we have created a gigantic culture of addiction by submitting to the will of authority

“Even in our so-called enlightened age, there are millions, probably billions, of people who, for various reasons, shy away from evidence-based scientific studies”

figures to escape life's torments, suffering and ultimate end. Many put *belief* before *science*. Belief can heal and bring comfort and hope, especially in difficult times.

Knowledge-based science, especially the one with historical portal figures like Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin, Albert Einstein, etcetera, could be described as cold, hard, and relentless. A geophysicist could tell us that one day, in a million years or so, the entire American continent will slide down under the Pacific plate and there turn into glowing magma to eventually appear elsewhere in a whole new form. A cosmologist could give a lecture on the stars and planets having in the distant future an ever-brighter red glow to eventually disappear into infinite darkness.

Adopting this type of knowledge and making it a control mechanism for life is not very appealing to us. Is this our only line of reasoning when considering our long-term future? Is this reality? Is what we see, hear, perceive, feel, and smell just fleeting moments in time made up of something that constitutes processes that are born to live but a short time before being transformed

into something else and then disappearing? What happens after death? Nothing?

I posed this question to a scholarly friend. He admitted to knowing nothing, but nobody really knows because we lack sufficient knowledge on the subject. The body is our suit, he said. With death we have grown out of it. The suit is cremated and buried but the soul moves on to another place. That's where we meet again. Where we can be reunited. That's what I believe, he said. It simply must be so.

Because otherwise ...? I asked.

Otherwise, it's like being deprived of the land I stand on, the wondrous sky I marvel at, the trust in everything I feel and the hope I have for the future of humankind, he replied.

I can relate to that, I said. I can really understand that. But it still doesn't outdo that which we call scientifically substantiated knowledge.

Sad, but true, he said.

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THE HEARTBEAT OF THE BUSINESS EVENTS COMMUNITY





Expedia Sells Egencia TO AMERICAN EXPRESS GLOBAL BUSINESS TRAVEL

A DEAL THAT was perhaps unlikely just one year ago: American Express Global Business Travel is to buy Expedia Group's corporate travel division Egencia. Terms of the agreement have not been disclosed.

Expedia Group will become a shareholder in Amex GBT, and part of the agreement will see the pair enter a long-term strategic partnership. The proposed deal is subject to consultation by Expedia Group and Egencia with employee representatives, as well as customary closing conditions, including regulatory approvals.

Amex GBT says it will "continue to invest in the Egencia brand, its people and technology, as part of the world's leading business travel platform".

Amex GBT CEO Paul Abbott says: "Our strategy is to provide customers with unparalleled choice by having the best solutions for each managed travel segment that we serve. In Egencia, we would welcome the industry's leading digital business travel platform."

Egencia would be strengthened by GBT's complementary technology, enterprise capabilities and cutting-edge content. This would create new opportunities for both multinational and small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) clients, suppliers and the talented teams within both organisations.

The deal comes amid ongoing interest in financial backing the new breed of corporate travel management startups, such as Trip Actions and Travel Perk. The pair recently announced \$155 million and \$166 million investment rounds, respectively.

Egencia was considered the smaller of the major travel management companies alongside Amex GBT, BCD Travel and CWT. It was created as a unit within Expedia in 2004, before renaming to Egencia in 2008 following the acquisition of a venture capital-backed business travel startup in France of the same name. Acquisitions of its own came in 2011

and 2012 with deals to buy Traveldoo and VIA Travel.

"We are thrilled by the potential transaction and what GBT and Egencia could achieve together, as Expedia Group seeks to simplify our business and be a leader in all of our endeavours. The combination of GBT's leading solutions with Egencia's great technology and team would help create the world's best business travel offerings for customers and suppliers," says Ariane Gorin, president of Expedia Business Services.

"At the same time, a greatly expanded, long-term accommodations supply agreement with Expedia Partner Solutions (EPS) would enhance GBT's Supply Market Place and meaningfully further Expedia Group's goal of powering businesses across the entire eco-system."



Denzil Rankine, *AMR International*:

We Have an Extraordinary Journey AHEAD OF US IN THIS INDUSTRY

TEXT

Michelle Russell

DENZIL RANKINE, founder and executive chairman of AMR International and coauthor of *Reinventing Live: The Always-on Future of Events*, on the monetisation of digital events:

“In theory, the economics are very positive for online only, but achieving them is really tough. And that’s because everyone came into this unprepared.”

Earlier this year, the book *Reinventing Live: The Always-on Future of Events* was published, after being rushed into production last year during Covid-19 by coauthors Denzil Rankine and Marco Giberti.

Actually, ‘rushed’ is a relative term. “It takes 10 weeks for a publisher to go at the speed of light in their world, from giving them a manuscript to actually managing to print the book,” Rankine told *Convene*. The founder and executive chairman of AMR International, a U.K.-based strategy consulting firm for the events industry, Rankine said that he and coauthor Giberti – founder and CEO of Miami, Florida-based consulting company Vesuvio Ventures – were “freaked out” about the timing.

As Rankine and Giberti, who has 25 years of experience in startups, media, technology, and the events industry, were writing the book, they were all too aware of how fast-moving our world has become because of Covid. Rankine said they wondered how different things may be by the

time people were able to hold the book in their hands.

As it turns out, they needn’t have worried – the major themes of *Reinventing Live* have only been validated since they put pen to paper. There have been major developments on the technology side, however, Rankine said. “Hopin, for example, raised money in what’s called the unicorn category or multiple unicorns,” he said. The online events platform is valued at over \$2 billion, and “it’s a company that’s only a couple of years old,” he said. “That is extraordinary. And some people would say it’s impossible to believe that that valuation is correct.”

While that development happened after the book went to press, Rankine said it’s only “material proof point of the value of event technology.” He also doesn’t think that he and Giberti were able to fully explore “that terrible word, the ‘monetisation’ of digital/virtual/online events,” but that, he said, remains “a work in progress” for industry practitioners.

“In theory, the economics are very positive for online only, but achieving them is really tough,” he said. “That’s because everyone came into this unprepared. This is an analog industry that had to – to use the jargon term – ‘pivot’ to digital or virtual overnight. And as a result, people weren’t prepared ... and there have been some bad user experiences.”

Now, Rankine said, we’re on a “really fast learning phase where the bad user experiences are more limited and the ability to deliver value and therefore to ask for payment from sponsors or from attendees is becoming more realistic. So, we have an extraordinary journey here in this industry that was 2 per cent digital at the time of us writing this book in 2019. And I think our view is that it should become 25 per cent digital. That’s a massive amount. That’s somewhere in the region of \$15 to \$20 billions of digital revenue that will come into an industry that didn’t understand it. There’s going to be a lot of figuring out, a lot of learning – as we say in the book, unlearning has to be done in order to relearn.”

Convene spoke to Rankine at his home in London via Zoom, where he was on lockdown, to hear more about the thinking behind *Reinventing Live*. **Did you anticipate that we would be at this stage in terms of vaccination distribution, variants, and other Covid-related impacts in the first quarter of 2021?**

“With very broad brushes, yes. But we were not looking at the question of when will the crisis end, when will we get back to some kind of new normal. We were simply looking at it from a business model point of view, knowing that we would come out of this at some stage. We were very confident that face-to-face would return. We

didn't see it as being wiped out in the way that paper advertising was wiped out by Google.

"We now have even more proof points to see that face-to-face will return, but it will come back smaller and it will come back slightly different. 'Hybrid' is the big word of the moment and in a number of years, it will disappear. It will just be completely normal for a conference to

It requires a certain mindset, and it's not easy to really execute excellently in conferences.

"But if you look at motor companies, automotive makers, some years ago, a number of them decided that all they were really going to do was design and market a car. The making of the car, you can just rent a factory to do that – that was their mindset. It's very complex to make a car, but

some of those people, it would be quite difficult to change. Some could, but others would struggle in the new world."

That, I think, plays into what you call O-O-O, online, offline, online, a main theme in the book. Can you elaborate here on that?

"The journey starts online, and it may be that you have this in your regular consumer life. You need go to buy a new product. You might start looking for something on your computer or your phone, so you start online. Also, in that journey, you might start online to see where you're going to go to look at things. So, the information, connection, discovery, and so on is going to start online.

"We already have some of that, although the initial move towards digital and event organising was just a cost-saving [measure] – we got rid of mailing out brochures, and we emailed them [instead] to people. But I wouldn't really call that online – that was a cost saving. So, we're now talking about more of a journey where there is much greater connection in that discovery phase, where people are deciding what they're going to engage with.

"If they want to go to a conference, they're looking at the programs, and then of course, they're leaving a digital exhaust. Everywhere you go, you leave this digital exhaust and that digital exhaust then allows the organiser and also their sponsors to see who's [going where]. We can also move towards peer-to-peer through this as well.

"This is the online preparation for the event. Then we say, you go offline. You could critique that and say, well, that's not entirely correct because maybe we'll have 100 people in a room or maybe thousands, but then we should also have many more remote and they are online.

"Look outside of what we've done before has to be the mantra"

have a digital journey beforehand, to have an in-person experience, and connection supported by more digital tools with remote attendance, and then more follow-up.

"That's just going to be a 'conference' and no one's going to call it a 'hybrid conference'. It's like, you don't go into someone's house now and say, 'Whoa, you've got electricity.' It's just there. So, we will get to that point – the sooner the better."

Do you see resistance to this new model? You talk about a number of challenges in the book. What would you say is the biggest challenge for a traditional association meeting planner?

"Well, if you don't mind, I will be a little brutal here. And I've mentioned this. It comes from *Star Wars*. You will have to unlearn what you have learned.

"There was one person we spoke to amongst the many thought leaders, CEOs, and so on, who made a bold statement – that really the organising skillset is the most commodified and the most at risk. I'm sorry, that's a brutal message, because I do know that the skillset to organise a conference is quite a tricky one to acquire.

that's actually a relatively commodified skillset compared to the design and the marketing.

"You could say similar things for some other technology companies. In our world, we have the same thing. There's a real focus on the process and organising skill, but actually that is not really the skill of tomorrow. The leaders are going to be the ones who know how to operate as community catalysts, as we say, not just event organisers, as people who are going to find solutions for their audience and the process part of organising is less important.

"So, I think for the whole community that you're working with, that's a tough message. And it means that the No. 1 skillset is no longer your food and beverage and your contracting of the venue and so on. The No. 1 skill set is matching your events – I shouldn't really say your events – your brand, to the needs of the audience, and constantly adapting it in an omnichannel world to what that audience needs.

"Quite a number of CEOs we spoke to would admit privately that half of the people they came into this with in 2020 would probably not have the right mindset for the future. And for



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We have always been proud to be a place that brings people from all over the world together. A home, purpose-built for making connections, where people make friends, collaborate on ideas and collectively share in an unrivalled event experience.

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“So, you could say you never really leave the online world. Then afterwards, obviously you want to have the online follow-up, having been offline at the events, and that’s tricky to really maintain that momentum afterwards. You tend to trail off a little faster, but that’s part of the whole point – maintaining that engagement. We’ll find that we don’t just necessar-

ily have annual meetings. We’re going to have more connection, can link to that annual celebration where people come together offline, face-to-face.”

the success of the recorded [content], including what were essentially advertisements – commercials. They achieved 90 per cent of their revenue target that they would normally get from an in-person event.

“I would say it would be interesting to do some finding out about using those broadcast techniques – use the whole range. Look outside of what

Switching gears a bit, but speaking to changing business models. We have all of these big, purpose-built venues, yet smaller events will be the trend going forward. With so much of their space going unused, how do you see event venues reimagining themselves?

“This is going to be challenging. If you look at venue occupancy, you will see some high points – Shanghai, Hong Kong, New York, Las Vegas. You’re going to find that certain places will continue because they’ve got the demand. We’re going to see that some of the major venues in somewhat less popular cities will be under pressure and they will be struggling to sell their space. They’re going to have to promote all the harder. I don’t know the extent to which they can offer more incentives in order to attract business, but some of those will be struggling.

“We see a lot of venues adding studios. I think that makes sense, because if you have a TV studio, this really talks to the modern world, the hybrid and so on. That takes up a small amount of your space, but that’s part of the attraction and that’s going to be a cost for those venues.

“I think we’re going to see continued growth for alternative venues, like the example of Berlin’s old railway station being a funky venue for fashion shows and so on. Those will have more of a future in this. But for the mid-tier, mid-sized, secondary and tertiary cities, it’s going to be a little bit more challenging, unfortunately.”

As you point out in the book, venues may need to invest more in technology in terms of digital way-finding signage, broadband, and other high-tech solutions that people have become accustomed to as consumers.

“You nailed it. I think that we will be less tolerant of a really outdated

“‘Hybrid’ is the big word of the moment and in a number of years, it will disappear”

ily have annual meetings. We’re going to have more connection, can link to that annual celebration where people come together offline, face-to-face.”

One of the things that I didn’t see you really explore in the book in terms of reskilling is the concept of a virtual event as more of a broadcast. What kinds of skills do you think are required along these lines?

“I think it’s really starting with a clean piece of paper. We have the Freight Waves case study in the book and Freight Waves [an information provider in the freight industry] is so interesting because these guys were not in the events industry. They didn’t understand events. And it was really early in the pandemic that they were faced with the difficulty of canceling their event. The CEO, Craig Fuller, he just simply thought, well, what if it’s just a TV show? So, he created one. That’s because he didn’t have any baggage.

“I would say the No. 1 thing, which is so difficult, is to unlearn what you’ve done in the past and do some finding out about broadcasts. You’ll sometimes hear people talk about a 70/30 relationship between live and recorded. In the Freight Waves case study, they were really surprised by

we’ve done before has to be the mantra. The best events are going to be those that reinvent their way of doing things. You don’t put technology at the centre, you put the customer at the centre. What is it that that customer is going to need?

“The first mistake we see is operating in the old way and trying to translate physical into digital – because it’s not a direct translation. And the second big mistake we see is someone who says, ‘Oh, here’s a shiny technology. This technology can make you a cup of coffee on Mars. And isn’t that cool?’ Well, the answer is, maybe that is cool, but no one wants a cup of coffee on Mars. That’s irrelevant.

“There’s this whole thing called design thinking that I just think is common-sense thinking, but someone’s given it this fancy name. It’s really just what is it your customer wants? Think about that customer. They need to be educated. They need to find about a new service. They need to do XYZ to get a promotion, to make their boss happy. How do we give it to them? Our toolkit is everything available in the world. Not just the way we did it yesterday, or the technology company that phoned me up saying, ‘You must do it my way.’”

“The No. 1 thing, which is so difficult, is to unlearn what you’ve done in the past”

experience in our business life. Given the consumer experience we have, which is pretty much seamless and integrated with what we can do with our phone, that won’t be accepted. We’ll see innovators and B-to-B will come in with better offerings – we’re going to see some changes there.”

One point you make in *Reinventing Live* is that many organisations do not have an event strategy. Can you elaborate?

“We quote the data. There was a survey done of associations and half of them don’t have a strategy. It is shocking that that is the case. It means that they have a plan and a budget. And you go from year to year and you budget, the financial processes. You say, ‘Okay, last year we had revenues of 100 K. This year let’s get to 103 K or 105 K, or whatever. So, let’s put the management team under a bit of pressure. See if we can do a bit more.’

“Then you have a plan. Your plan is, we’re going to run the event in this venue and we’re going to execute it in this way. Someone might have some bright ideas, or you may have an approach to add some sessions or do some things – but you’re just operating.

“All you’re doing is operating, like you’re in the railroad and you’re just operating the trains. You’ve got a budget and you’ve got a plan and you make them all go. The difficulty is that

the served markets are changing. So, our customers, who are our attendees and our sponsors and so on, they’re operating in really dynamic markets, which are changing the whole time. And there’s going to be innovation. There’ll be new, hot topics. Things coming in. The structured industry could change. There could be consolidation. There is a remarkable amount of change that takes place over a number of years. If you just operate with a budget and with a plan, at best you are following the industry.

“The event organiser should no longer be an event organiser they should be the community catalyst. They should understand their community. They should understand what is needed in that community. What will be the topics of tomorrow? How do we make sure we address them? How do we reshape our events? Do we close down certain segments of it? Do we open up new segments? You are then doing this with a strategy and your strategy reflects the future of your served market. And by having that strategy, we’re able then to keep up with the needs of our users.

“We’ve seen a number of major trade shows collapse, Comdex, and so on. These were events without strategies – unfortunately, it has been proven that having no strategy is detrimental to the health of your event. And yet we’ve got this operating

mindset. I talked about that earlier – the operator side is that skillset described as commodified by some, and the skillset that’s really needed is that of the brand manager or the strategist or the community catalyst, who’s going to constantly shape the event for the needs of the industry.”

You saw some of these changes coming before Covid, but the pandemic has accelerated them.

“That is absolutely correct. Unfortunately, the industry was very robust before Covid-19. Although there were these headwinds, people were still making money. They were still being successful. There was no burning need to change. What would happen is that you could have a discussion with some people, and they would say, ‘Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. I guess we could do things a bit better to make the user experience a bit better,’ or ‘Yeah, we don’t have much digital.’ And then it became, at best, a Friday afternoon activity to have a think about how to change things. There was no compelling need to change. That’s why this industry came into the crisis wholly unprepared.”

You say that organisers are not going to monetise event tech well, because they’re still learning. Could you give an example of how they could monetise event tech?

“What I’m saying is to begin is extremely hard. With the learning process, it’s going to become easier.

“The event organiser should no longer be an event organiser they should be the community catalyst”

I'll give the case study example of an organiser called Easyfairs. Based in continental Europe, they've got 150 events spread across the countries, slightly smaller events. They created a product called Easy Go – a bundle of digital services.

“All of their customers were given this bundle of digital services and they started this six or seven years ago. When they first launched it, it had limited success. Then they found that it wasn't getting a resign. That is because they didn't create that bundle of services fully matched to the needs of their customers. So, they then looked at it, found out what would customers value. In one case, the trade-show element would be the lead retrieval, the scanning of badges and the data linked to that.

“They discovered also that some customers were more interested in getting new leads. Others were more interested in promoting their brands. So, they reinvented the packages of Easy Go to make sure that they suited the needs of exhibitors and sponsors, also specifically that the attendees would be engaged with the services.

“They relaunched it, monitored the progress. And that became 10 per cent of the group's revenues, in an industry where digital was 2 per cent. They could only do that because they worked really hard at it, recognised the misstep they had made to begin

with, and then recreated it in the eyes of the needs of their customers.

“I think that's the standout example. The lessons there are just exactly what I've described: Find out what your customers are trying to achieve, look for the digital tools which already exist, and then find a way to introduce them without overcharging your customers, pricing it to value. Then you'll be successful.

“It's very important to have team members who are going to ensure that your customers actually use these digital tools. This isn't a question of creating a set of digital tools, doing a press release, and saying, ‘Here we are, isn't it great? We've got an online marketplace. Life is fantastic.’ That's actually the first step of the journey. You then have to make sure that it's being used and that's called ‘the customer success function.’

“I would say as you're selecting your vendor for whatever platform you're using it's going to be very important to test them out on their customer success support and ask the very simple question: Who is going to make sure that this is being used effectively and properly? Is that coming from you guys in the software house, or are you expecting us to do that?

“Because it has to happen and there is a cost to it. Then we will get the engagement because people are

going to be used to it, but our audience isn't used to these tools. And if you just send them an email telling them about a wonderful, shiny tool, they're not going to all jump on and use it tomorrow, or they may not use it properly.”

What kind of feedback have you gotten on the book?

“It's actually been received really well. I think it's created a lot of debate, which is what we're looking for. We just hope that it's going to be a guide for people in the industry. I've been staggered to receive comments from people who I thought had no interest or knowledge of events at all, who've gotten in touch to say, ‘This is fantastic.’ Because events have touched them a little bit more than I would have imagined. We're delighted because we really wanted to have reach within the events industry itself, but there's also some positive feedback from outside. I guess it's made all the effort worthwhile.”

Michelle Russell is editor in chief of Convene.

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To Boldly Go ...

“For someone who was never meant for this world,
I must confess I’m suddenly having a hard time leaving it.
Of course, they say every atom in our bodies was once
part of a star. Maybe I’m not leaving ...
maybe I’m going home”

Ending monologue from *Gattaca* (1997) by ANDREW NICCOL





Christopher Nassetta, *CEO, Hilton Hotels:* **Business Travel Is Back TO ABOUT 50 PER CENT OF PRE-COVID LEVELS, BUT SOME MARKETS ARE STRONGER**

THERE ARE REASONS to be optimistic about the recovery of corporate travel following a prolonged coronavirus-related slowdown.

Business travel continues to lag the leisure recovery, but Hilton CEO Christopher Nassetta sees reasons for optimism. While overall it's back to about 50 per cent pre-Covid levels, Nassetta told CNBC it's more like 75 per cent in some markets.

"This is as good as I've felt since the pandemic started in terms of where we are and what I see in forward-looking trends and bookings in the business," Christopher Nassetta said in an interview on Closing Bell.

Leisure travel has been propelling the industry's recovery so far, and Christopher Nassetta said he expects to see record numbers in that category this summer. However, a return of business travellers is crucial for a complete rebound in the hospitality sector.

"Business travel, while it's lagging, it's coming back. It's probably about half the levels that we saw at the prior peak. Group and events are lagging that, but they're coming back."

One particular reason to be hopeful is that the hotel operator is experiencing stronger corporate bookings in markets where the pandemic situation has improved.

"As businesses are starting to reopen offices and an expectation of in the fall kids going back to school, people start to travel for business again, and they start to congregate in meetings. If you look at markets even in the U.S. and certainly China where they're further along, we already see business travel back to effectively 75 per cent of volume levels that we saw in 2019."

Many companies plan to adopt more flexible work arrangements postpandemic. Given that change, there have been questions about how travelling for meetings and conferences fits into that hybrid-work equation. Some have suggested business travel will never fully recover.

Jamie Dimon has expressed dissatisfaction with remote work and videoconference meetings during the Wall Street Journal CEO Council event. The JP Morgan Chase chairman and CEO said he was "about to cancel" all his Zoom meetings.

"We want people back to work, and my view is that sometime in September–October it will look just like it did before."

Jamie Dimon also said JP Morgan had lost business to competitors in some instances during the pandemic when rival bankers travelled for in-person meetings.

Companies that suffered financially during the pandemic will have to build up their travel budgets over time, Christopher Nassetta said. But in general, he feels there is a broad desire to cut back on virtual meetings and conferences.

"The anecdotal evidence, as I talk to our big customers and to friends who run businesses and the like, is that there's a huge amount of pent-up demand to get out and travel for business and to get out for group meetings and events, just because it's been so long since they've done it."



Becoming SMART A DESTINATIONS' JOURNEY

TEXT

Ivo Franschitz + Henrik von Arnold, Enited

BE Industry | Our Understanding
This is a people-to-people business. Period.

It is all about building, maintaining and improving those personal business relationships, not only in times of difficulties. The business events (BE) industry has been in a transformation process for quite some time. Ways of engagement have changed. Content, structure and formats of business events have evolved. Live and virtual channels have started to become one. And then Covid-19 happened. After a first phase of understanding and coping with the unprecedented situation and the complexity of its consequences, it became clear that Covid-19 acts, first and foremost, as an accelerator of this transformation, and not as its principal initiator.

Turning challenges into opportunities

The Covid-19 pandemic has offered our industry a unique opportunity to finally dare and cleverly break old habits and structures. It is leveling the playing field for all players in the international business events industry. And not necessarily the big

ones, but the SMART ones will be the comeback winners and become new leaders in that transformation process. We are also convinced that our business events industry can become a fast and efficient driver in any economic recovery plan and journey.

Hence, now it's the outstanding moment and chance to rethink, redefine and redesign the purpose and value proposition of our business events industry. By doing so, we might also finally get rid of some very old and unfitting definitions, wordings and alphabet soups. But it's neither only about the so-called virtual revolution nor the mere adaptation of the destinations' infrastructure, logistic and hospitality services to the current and post-Covid-19 market. And it's not about finding the new normal. It's about creating the next normal.

Smartness | Our Approach
The future belongs to the SMART ones.

The term SMART has, of course, great many definitions and meanings, as well as it depends on the context it is used in. Our understanding for SMART is best defined by the following

adjectives assigned to each of the words' five letters and based on an original quote by Gerrit Jessen, our Enited Network of Excellence partner.

In addition, to create more purpose and meaning, we have designed a set of 3 attributes for each of those adjectives.

- **Sustainable**
holistic, impactful, inclusive
- **Mindful**
aware, conscious, observant
- **Agile**
collaborative, adaptable, responsive
- **Reputable**
reliable, professional, transparent
- **Transformational**
visionary, encouraging, resilient

Our definition of SMART requires, most of all, a change of mindset, of principles and of behaviour from destinations, in its future involvement and engagement in the business events industry. That will naturally lead to a review and an adaption of the business tool-set currently in use, to create those mentioned, new business opportunities and success stories.

“The biggest challenge for every BE destination is the complexity of its own stakeholder world”

BE Destination | Our Vision *Becoming a SMART destination.*

Those destinations who have understood that they are part of the live communication industry. Those who market their destinations as live communication platforms and enablers, instead of geographically defined infrastructure and hospitality locations.

- It's all about values, emotions, storytelling, authenticity and trust.
- It's about building and engaging whole communities in a destination rather than continuing to market or sell products and services of a destination.
- The focus should be on the cocreation of an engaging working environment of exchanging information, sharing ideas, creating new knowledge and initiating solution-based action for the individual benefit of every involved participant.
- By widening the scope and scale of local involvement in the destination, beyond the infrastructure, logistic and hospitality providers, it will add value to every business event.
- It needs a new definition for the “Five Ps” and a better

understanding for the principles of destination marketing (SAVE), in a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) marketplace.

- Becoming a SMART destination is more than the adaptation of strategies and tactics or structure and processes. It needs the mentioned change in mindset, of principles and behaviours.

Consequently, it needs a new way of matching clients' expectations with value propositions of destinations, which ...

- ... breaks the current practice of commodity traders for infrastructure, spaces and services, based on existing demand and supply.
- ... aims to improve the many times inefficient, inaccurate and standardised process of buying and selling.
- ... leads to a new form of collaboration, with common goals and by joint efforts, beyond the rigid client and supplier relationships.

At the end of the day, it defines a new generation of business events by engaging both stakeholder “worlds” and by creating added value, together, for everybody involved. A destination

which stays connected and relevant for all industry stakeholders, be it the local destination partners or the international (potential) clients. Transforming the destination into a communication platform of knowledge and experiences, make use of business events as catalysts for development and growth and generate educational and economic legacy in the city, region or country. And creating a stage setting for the future of international business events, where people come together in inspiring surroundings, experience new ideas and innovations, and engage in the design of solutions.

Journey | Our Roadmap *Leading the way.*

To embark on this journey, it takes willingness and courage, daring to step out of the current *rats' race* of selling destinations. And it needs a clear and practical roadmap. In cooperation with our United Network of Excellence partner, Angeles Moreno from The Creative Dots and based on her *CX Design Playbook*, we have created an experience-based methodology, defining three major phases or stages in this evolution process.

“To embark on this journey, it takes willingness and courage, daring to step out of the current *rats’ race* of selling destinations”

Stage One | Discovery

Why should you become a SMART destination?

1. Assessment Using strengths-based methodologies, for example Voice of Customer (VoC) or Voice of Employee (VoE), to embrace leadership development and organisational change and to understand the actual customer event journey, including stories of failure and success.

2. Persona Defining for whom you build your value proposition. Empathise with and observe their problems.

Stage Two | Evolution

How do you become a SMART destination?

1. Talent Identifying leaders of transformation within your organisation, as well as in your external stakeholder world, to become agents of change and to build a winning team.

2. Design Rethinking your value proposition and redesigning the customer event journey (customer centric and after a segmentation process.)

Stage Three | Transformation

What makes you a successful SMART destination?

1. Implementation and Evaluation

Making it happen and real with clearly defined guidelines and processes, through individually designed coaching sessions.

Results | Our Take

Demonstrating competence, showcasing excellence, documenting relevance.

The biggest challenge for every BE destination is the complexity of its own stakeholder world, made obvious by the diverse, individual definitions for purpose and goals (*why*) and the different views on the rules of time (*when*). Hence, any success story needs to include both the “quick wins” and the sustainable impact. And becoming SMART also means a new way of measuring the success. It needs a smart way of defining, collecting and analysing data, beyond the big data formulas (for example, bed nights, coffee cups and individual spending).

What are some of the main benefits for becoming a SMART destination?

In our opinion, it will give those destinations who dare to set out on that journey, the decisive edge in a very competitive, international business events market and create the needed differentiator for the BE destinations’ future value propositions and its success story.

- Building new and stronger relationships across and beyond the rigid *client and supplier* definition.
- Creation of a *think tank* platform of decision makers and experts, generating concrete results.
- Demonstrating new ways of client engagement.
- Creating additional stakeholder value and involvement in the destination.
- (Re)Positioning the destination through thought leadership.
- (Re)Defining the value perception of the business events industry.

Closing our thought leadership paper on SMART destinations, in a nutshell, we call on those destinations who not only want to get ready to face the future, but would rather define their own future. Be daring and bold and set the course on your own journey for becoming a SMART destination.



The Impacts of the Pandemic ON EUROPEAN CONVENTION BUREAUS

ONE HUNDRED thirty-four convention bureaus in 33 European countries participating in the Dr Rob Davidson of MICE Knowledge survey in early 2021 showed that one in four of these destination marketing organisations had reductions in staff levels.

One in three have suffered cuts in their public sector funding since the beginning of the pandemic. Seventy-five per cent of convention bureaus, depending on financial support from their partners or members, have had reductions in funding from those sources.

Despite all this, a clear majority (3 in 4) of the convention bureaus are optimistic or very optimistic about their future, according to the report *The Impacts of the Pandemic on Convention Bureaus in Europe*.

Responses to the survey show that many convention bureaus have suspended one or more of their marketing activities, such as bidding and advertising, but others have switched over to digitalised forms, from virtual fam trips and digital awards ceremonies for ambassadors, to participation in online exhibitions.

Many have used the past year to focus on making improvements to their services, resulting, for example, in more effective websites, bid books,

and use of the social media. Various European convention bureaus have also increased their education and training activities, improving their own skills and knowledge as well as those of their stakeholders.

In terms of the convention bureaus' predictions for the future, there is widespread expectation that the digitalisation of meetings will continue into the postpandemic world; there will be more focus on local and national markets; health, hygiene and safety of destinations will be paramount; sustainability, wellness and the social legacy of meetings will become more relevant; and in-person meetings will be generally smaller and shorter but will have to offer participants more genuine value.

"This survey indicates that European convention bureaus are working hard to support their destinations by innovating and adapting to the immense challenges now facing them, including continuing uncertainty about the duration of the pandemic. It provides evidence that when the recovery comes, the bureaus will be ready and willing to play their part in restoring prosperity, travel and animation in their destinations," says Rob Davidson.

Some of the conclusions in the survey

Changes in convention bureaus' staff levels in the first 12 months of the pandemic. Most had no changes. But overall, there were net reductions in staff numbers: 77 full-time staff 24 part-time staff.

Many of these reductions may not be permanent, as they include staff who have been redeployed into other types of work, as well as people who have been moved from full-time to part-time contracts or on temporary leave of absence from work.

Changes in convention bureaus' funding levels in the first 12 months of the pandemic

- One in three convention bureaus experienced reductions in their government/public funding.
- One in six convention bureaus saw increases in their government funding.
- Seventy-five per cent of convention bureaus receiving financial support from their partners/members experienced reductions in funding from those sources.
- Changes in convention bureaus' activities in the first 12 months of the pandemic.

Bidding for conferences

For most of the convention bureaus, this activity continued as usual, but over 20 of them stopped or significantly reduced their bidding.

Branding/positioning

Continued as before, but with more use of digital tools.

Forty-five per cent of the convention bureaus participated in one or more of these.

Ambassador programmes

Most continued as before, but events such as award ceremonies went ahead in digital forms. Several new ambassador programmes were launched or planned.

people's general ability and willingness to travel.

Main short-term changes:

- More use of all digital marketing tools.
- More preparation for hybrid and other digitalised forms of meetings.
- More need to support stakeholders with information on changes in the destinations.
- More focus on local and national markets, instead of international events.

“In-person meetings will be generally smaller and shorter but will have to offer participants more genuine value”

Websites

Significant investment of time in redesigning and updating websites, especially with Covid-related information and details of opportunities for hybrid events in the destinations.

Advertising

More use of digital forms of advertising. But 20 per cent of the convention bureaus suspended or greatly reduced this activity.

Social media

Significant increases in the use of the social media for staying in touch with stakeholders. LinkedIn was by far the channel most used for this purpose.

Fam trips and site visits

Thirty per cent of the convention bureaus suspended all of these trips, and over 20 per cent replaced them with virtual fam trips.

Exhibitions

Most of the major exhibitions for our industry took place in virtual forms.

Market research

More investment in this activity, but for many convention bureaus there was a change of focus from researching international conferences to investigating “proximity” markets.

Advocacy

Generally increased, with a greater focus on lobbying governments for financial relief support.

Services for meeting planners

More guidance for convention bureaus' clients and potential clients particularly on facilities and services for hybrid meetings, and updates on health and safety measures in operation in the destinations.

Future changes anticipated by the convention bureaus in the short term

Many convention bureaus expressed great uncertainty over the immediate future of our industry and their role in it. The two most important unknowns were the effectiveness of the vaccination programmes and

Future changes anticipated by the convention bureaus in the long term

The convention bureaus' predictions for how our industry will function in a postpandemic world indicated a widespread conviction that many of the trends already identified in this survey would continue and intensify.

Main long-term changes:

- More hybridisation of meetings and events. Seventy per cent of respondents expressed their belief that hybrid and other digitalised forms of meetings were here to stay.
- Shorter meetings, with fewer in-person participants. More multi-hub events, splitting up large international conferences to a number of regional hubs.
- More attention paid to wellness, sustainability and the social legacy of meetings. Health, safety and hygiene conditions in destinations will be of paramount importance.
- More value will be expected from in-person attendance in meetings: better networking opportunities, more authenticity, less superficiality.

“There is widespread expectation that the digitalisation of meetings will continue into the postpandemic world”

Convention bureaux' sentiments regarding their future:

- Seventy-six per cent of respondents were optimistic or very optimistic about their future.
- Twenty-four per cent of respondents were neutral or quite pessimistic about their future.

Their means reasons for feeling this way were:

- The immutable need of humans to meet others for live experiences.
- Their excitement about the new opportunities presented by hybrid events.
- Confidence that their destinations will be attractive to meeting planners in a postpandemic world.
- Our industry's resilience and ability to adapt to new circumstances.
- General uncertainty about the future and the longer-term impacts of the pandemic.
- The length of time we may have to wait before the recovery begins in earnest.
- The impacts of the loss of income that partners and members will experience as more face-to-face meetings are replaced by virtual events.

Conclusion

The general picture to emerge from this survey is one of European convention bureaux working hard to support their destinations by innovating and adapting to the immense challenges now facing them. Many are doing so with fewer resources, whether staffing or funding, and in the face of continuing uncertainty about the duration of the pandemic.

Some convention bureaux have suspended one or more of their marketing activities, but most have continued, many in digitalised forms, from virtual fam trips and digital awards ceremonies for ambassadors, to participation in online exhibitions.

Many destination marketing organisations have used the past year to focus on making improvements to their services, resulting, for example, in better websites, bid books, and use of the social media. Many have also increased their education and training activities, improving their own skills as well as those of their stakeholders.

In terms of their predictions for the future, there is widespread expectation that the digitalisation of meetings will continue into the

postpandemic world; there will be more focus on local and national markets; health, hygiene and safety of destinations will be paramount; sustainability, wellness and the social legacy of meetings will become more relevant; and in-person meetings will be generally smaller and shorter but will have to offer participants more genuine value.

In April 2021, the majority of convention bureaux feel quite optimistic or very optimistic about the future, counting on the enduring and intrinsic need of human beings to meet face-to-face for the exchange of knowledge, networking, and live experiences. When recovery comes, European convention bureaux will be ready and willing to play their part in restoring prosperity, travel and animation in their destinations.

MICE Knowledge is a London-based consultancy specialising in research, education and training for the international meetings industry. Dr Rob Davidson is the Managing Director. www.miceknowledge.com



PHOTO Sara Appelgren

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Endurance

THE PRIMARY SURVIVAL TOOL

I UNDERSTAND that the work in the business events industry right now has endurance as its primary survival tool. You need to be focused, persistent and patient, for sure, but you also need to be proactive.

Many have taken the opportunity to renovate, train, and educate themselves, and most importantly, to just survive until it's time to open the doors again to welcome new meetings.

Naturally, many employees at all levels have been forced to leave meeting and event jobs against their will, just to survive, and not all of them will return. We are talking about thousands upon thousands of jobs across the globe, and many owners have realised that it is in fact possible to run their businesses with a smaller staff than before the pandemic. And considering that it may be a few years until we're back on top again some may choose to hold off on staffing up for a while.

But staying focused also means keeping track of how and what your competitors are doing. To boost your external analysis to higher levels than before the pandemic and making sure to maintain a positive flow of

knowledge into the entire organisation. It shouldn't be too difficult to achieve improvement within this area since the external analysis appears to have been almost non-existent during the pandemic. And now is not the time to lose focus.

A great many companies have also achieved significant improvements in terms of safety and hygiene. The certifications continue to increase across the board and worldwide. Now we must also make sure to maintain that higher level going forward, do our work consistently well, and be patient – when it turns out that it is not always 100 per cent, it is vital to make sure to get back to 100 per cent again. Hygiene is also part of the safety work we must put more focus on.

There is also need for an increased supply of tailored training for leaders, management teams and coworkers throughout the global meeting and event industry. Meetings can be, and in many cases also are, a crucial moment in a company's development. The primary business areas are all based on increased profitability, focusing on building or strengthening corporate culture.

Here, collaborations such as The Strategic Alliance of the National Convention Bureaux of Europe should really be promoted and highlighted by all member states. It's all about exchanging experiences, sharing knowledge and opportunities. Nine countries founded the organisation in 2014 at Imex Las Vegas. Today there are 28 member countries.

The importance of tailoring education based on the organisation's needs, is so great it's practically boundless. So how come we don't already have such educational and developmental traditions in place?

To be proactive naturally means taking the initiative, engaging in external analysis, believing in your coworkers, and believing that education creates new opportunities, but above all, to actually *do* something. And to do something *now*.

Perseverance and proactivity go hand in hand.

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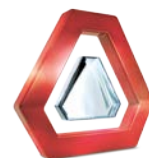
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