



BOARDROOM

THE BEST RESOURCE FOR ASSOCIATIONS

THE CHALLENGES OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

— 2021 VOLUME 1 | VOLUME 2 | VOLUME 3 | VOLUME 4 —

BUILDING
BACK BETTER

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While 2021 is still looking quite similar to 2020 – to everyone’s discomfort and disillusionment – we, at Boardroom, can’t remain at a standstill. In these unprecedented circumstances, agility is key, not only for associations but for all types of ventures – ours included.

So, for once, this letter to you, dear readers, will be devoted to how we think we can do our part in building a more sustainable future and assisting in the creation of an accelerated recovery into a better world.

This month, we’re launching a brand-new initiative called #Roadmap 2030. Working hand-in-hand with Bond, a seasoned agency that specializes in digital transformation, we’re aiming to build a progressive, future-focused community and learning forum for associations.

#Roadmap2030 will deliver year-round, hands-on educational content, networking opportunities, mentoring, news, and community engagement.

Our mission – and we accept it with open arms – is to safeguard the future-readiness and economic clout of the associations industry through continuous empowerment of association leadership and staff. #Roadmap2030, as a pioneering community platform,

is not an end in itself, it’s a means that will allow you to explore new tools and strategies that will give you a distinct advantage in this new world.

We’re undoubtedly on our way to a prosperous, community-driven and sustainable future and associations have a role to play in it.

This month also marks the beginning of our new editorial series, ‘Building Back Better’ (pages 6 to 9). In clear alignment with #Roadmap2030, we want to explore the opportunities that lie ahead to help build greater resilience in a post-COVID world. By systematically addressing the root causes of vulnerability, and going beyond simply returning economies and livelihoods to normal, the concept serves as a framework in which every initiative can be designed to make the planet a better place.

But what does this mean for associations, exactly? This is what we will focus on, both in print and online, in the months to come – and we’ll do that by sector. Don’t hesitate to reach out – and we hope that you will – if you want to make your voice heard. After all, it’s not just about climate change, it’s about making the planet a better place to live in and on, and you, as associations, are part of the solution.



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Founder & Chief Editor



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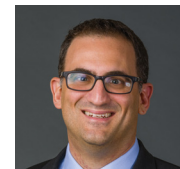
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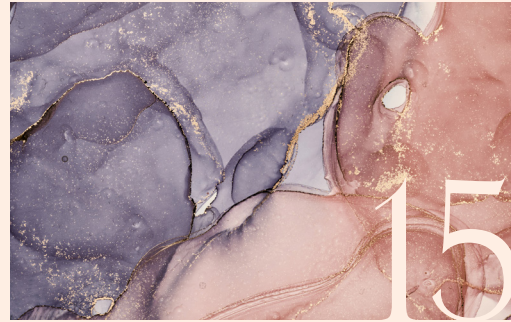
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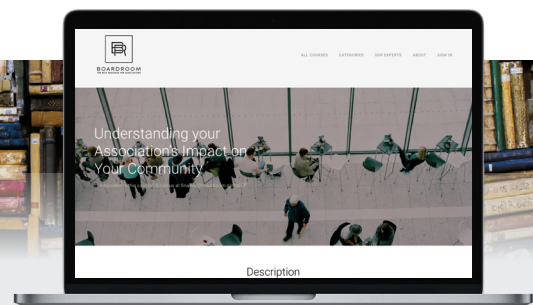
Sven Bossu, CEO of AIPC, argues that connectivity, inclusiveness, and experiments are the three essential pillars of digital transformation.

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Building Back Better Series

The Strive for a Sustainable Future



By now, you should have heard of the Building Back Better concept, if only in President Biden's inauguration speech. It finds its roots in the improvement of land use, spatial planning and construction standards through the recovery process, and has now expanded to represent a broader opportunity by building greater resilience in recovery by systematically addressing the root causes of vulnerability. But what does this mean for associations? In the first part of Boardroom's 'Building Back Better' series, we'll explore why associations may be the key to advancing the ambitious goals of a better world, while also making major strides in achieving goals of their own.

Words Lane Nieset & Remi Deve

For the economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis to be durable and resilient, a return to 'business as usual' and environmentally destructive investment patterns and activities have to be avoided at all costs. Uncontrolled global environmental emergencies such as climate change and biodiversity loss could cause social and economic damages far larger than those caused by the pandemic. To counter this, economic recovery initiatives should be designed to "build back better". This actually means going beyond than just getting economies and livelihoods quickly back to normal – if there's actually such a thing.

In this context, recovery policies need to trigger investment and behavioral changes that will reduce the likelihood of future shocks and increase society's resilience to them when they do occur. Central to this approach is a focus on well-being and inclusiveness. In this regard for example, the Madrid Convention Bureau has committed to promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all – in clear alignment with the 8th UN Sustainable Development Goal.

Other key dimensions for assessing whether recovery packages can "build back better" include alignment with long-term emission reduction goals, factoring in resilience to climate impacts, slowing biodiversity loss and increasing circularity of supply chains. In practice, well-designed recovery policies can cover several of these dimensions at once, such as catalyzing the shift towards accessibility-based mobility systems, and investing in low-carbon and decentralized electricity systems.

GLOBAL GROWTH STRATEGY

As Europe accelerates toward a climate-neutral economy by 2050, climate policy may be the key to the continent's—and world's—growth strategy. As European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen explained when outlining the European Green Deal: *"I am convinced that the old growth model based on fossil fuels and pollution is out of date and out of touch with our planet."* Echoing von der Leyen's comment, Frans Timmermans, executive vice president for the European Green Deal, put it this way: *"In this crucial moment for our health, our economy and for global climate action, it is essential that Europe leads the way to a green recovery. We owe it to our children and grandchildren*

to take action now. Today, Europe is showing the world how we will enhance the wellbeing and prosperity of our citizens in the next decade as we work towards our goal of climate neutrality by 2050."

Part of the ambition to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 means replacing the EU's current climate ambition of a 40% cut for 2030 and raising it to 50-55%. In early 2021, the Commission will adopt a new, more ambitious EU strategy on adaptation to climate change in order to strengthen efforts on climate-proofing, resilience building, prevention and preparedness, ensuring that businesses, cities and citizens are able to integrate climate change into their risk management practices.

The Commission's plan for the European Green Deal outlines 10 main goals, which include a new circular economic action plan, which would prepare for "clean steelmaking" using hydrogen by 2030; doubling or tripling the renovation rate of buildings; a pollution-free environment; a healthier agriculture system through the reduction of chemical pesticides, fertilisers and antibiotics; a transition away from fossil fuels; a R&D and innovation programme revolving around climate-friendly technologies; and transport (we'll be diving deeper into the sectors in the coming months).

WHAT IS A STAKE

So everything is interconnected, and we can actually argue that a collective strive for a sustainable future is what is a stake for a better and efficient recovery. But what exactly does this mean for associations? What role do they have to play?

"Associations represent their members—organizations, companies, individuals etc.—who serve many purposes and are engaged in a multitude of sectors and interests," says Silke Schlinnertz, Head of Growth for Euroheat & Power and a member of the Boardroom Advisory Board. *"Organizations and people join and are actively involved in their association because they want to work together on a common cause or interest. One could say members of an association represent the 'activists' of our society. Those activists shape our society when they join forces, and that collaboration is facilitated by associations. However, it's just the starting point, and I believe it's only fair to say that together, we are stronger and can create a bigger impact!"*

Associations are created to establish strength and unity in working toward common goals in virtually every profession. The overall result of these connections is more informed legislators, a more informed public, and better lawmaking in general. With a 'building back better' approach, they can play a part in making energy, transport and buildings greener, improving the quality of air, water and soil, and producing healthier food and sustainable agriculture. *"If we don't act together, the consequences of inaction on our health, our environment and our economy will be just devastating,"* says Schlinnertz.

As a group of people getting together to advocate for a cause or advance a particular field of expertise, associations should develop their people and working culture across the industry they represent - and make sure they make tangible, measurable impacts. As they ease out of lockdown and plan for a brand-new chapter of their life, they should especially review and report on their industry's social contribution (in the broadest possible sense) and their latest conversations with their stakeholders and

governments on how their activities and initiatives can be used to drive and accelerate economic and social recovery.

Here's something to consider in the matter: when was the last time you analysed your ethics codes? Associations have long held corporate responsibility, but there's a social responsibility to uphold as well. It's been five years since the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development set the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Have any of these goals been reflected in your code of ethics?

For example, part of "no one left behind" is reducing social and economic inequalities, but these inequalities start at the base level. It's important to voice and stress disapproval of discrimination, harassment and hostility against others as individuals or groups. COVID-19 is a great example of how inequalities in economic systems became blatantly apparent. As the world races toward vaccination solutions, it's clear that there needs to be universal basic services, such as healthcare coverage and free or reduced water, electricity, housing, mobility and education.



STRUCTURAL CHANGE

As Kinga Joó, member of the European Economic and Social Committee and co-chair of the EEA CC, stated: “*Structural change, such as the green transition, has to be accompanied by social measures to be successful. For low-income households it is important to consider how to alleviate and compensate for the disproportionate impacts. Supporting social investment can enable efforts towards climate neutrality, generate green jobs and narrow socio-economic disparities.*”

Around the globe, governments are starting to open their eyes and be more open to change, introducing principles in line with the universal goals that have an immediate impact on society, but they're also looking to one another – and associations – for ideas, support, and exchange of knowledge.

New Zealand, Iceland, Wales, Finland and Scotland, for example, formed the [Wellbeing Economy Governments partnership \(WEGo\)](#)

Associations also play a large and significant role in raising awareness and ambition in terms of pinpointing solutions on how to achieve SDGs on the path to the EGD 2050 timeline

to share expertise and policy practices from both national and regional governments and address the current economic, social and environmental challenges. Convention bureaus are also getting on board with action plans that align with the SDGs, focusing on areas like infrastructure and responsible consumption.

For example, the [Madrid Convention Bureau](#) is educating its team on environmental awareness and the reduction of energy consumption so that even work in the office has minimal environmental impact. In this way, the efforts will extend to events, and, in time, to the city and its residents.

Associations also play a large and significant role in raising awareness and ambition in terms of pinpointing solutions on how to achieve SDGs on the path to the EGD 2050 timeline. “*The overriding objective is to become net carbon neutral by second half of the century, and that has to be done in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals,*” explains Philip Turner, Head of

Sustainable Development Strategy for the [International Association of Public Transport \(UITP\)](#). “*I would argue that if you're not compliant with the Green Deal objective, you're not really part of the game, so to speak. We know what the final destination is—the question is how to get there.*” In that regard, “*associations have a role to build capacity in order to share best practice and knowledge so things can go quicker, faster and be more efficient.*” Turner concludes.

Precisely, we believe the Building Back Better strategy provides the ideal framework to “*get there*” as it aims to reduce the risk to the people of nations and communities in the wake of future disasters and shocks, integrating disaster risk reduction measures into the restoration of physical infrastructure, social systems and shelter, and the revitalization of livelihoods, economies and the environment.

In this context, How to Prioritize Social and Ecological Goals in Organizations, How to Ensure Cooperation and Solidarity at all Levels for the Greater Good, The Circular Economy for Dummies, Investing for Ecological and Well-Being Goals are some of the topics we're going to explore both on [#Roadmap2030](#) and in Boardroom, and we'd love you to be part of the conversation.

This article is graciously sponsored by Madrid Convention Bureau, whose values align with the Building Back Better concept.



**MADRID
CONVENTION
BUREAU**

Everybody's an Expert on Everything

International Advisor to the Global Association Hubs **Martin Sirk** wonders who the guarantors of knowledge and expertise will be in the post-truth era.

Will it be international associations? I really hope so. Because this is a problem that can't be delegated to governments, nor can it be crowd-sourced by citizens-at-large, nor outsourced to corporations or underfunded universities. This problem doesn't recognize national borders, it isn't a priority for the vast majority of media companies, and lacks its own UN agency. And as for the Big Tech players, their ubiquitous obtrusiveness is dramatically expanding the scale and urgency of the problem, not least because of their insistence that they are actually the solution!

When all is said and done, which organizations apart from associations have the in-house and frontline experience, worldwide expertise-networks, depths of curated content, quality-management systems, review processes, and the (all too often ignored) contextual understanding to take on this role?

COMING FULL CIRCLE

Associations have historically been loath to define themselves as society's guarantors of knowledge and expertise, except with regard to their own narrow community. Pre-internet, without needing to push themselves forward, associations' expertise was sought after by policymakers and trusted by the vast majority of the public. There was no need to advocate and promote this role.

Things are very different today. As Tom Nichols puts it in his book "The Death of Expertise": *"We have come full circle from a pre-modern age, in which folk wisdom filled unavoidable gaps in human knowledge, through a period of rapid development based heavily on*

specialization and expertise, and now to a post-industrial, information-oriented world where all citizens believe themselves to be experts on everything."

The world's accumulated cornucopia of knowledge is waiting to be plucked with the swipe of a finger or a click of the mouse. Unfortunately, it's also waiting to be misunderstood and misused, decontextualised and disbelieved. And mixed in amongst this treasure trove there lurks an even larger agglomeration of myths, fantasies, lies and disinformation, cunningly disguised to be virtually indistinguishable. We may have generated more data in the last two years than in the entire previous history of human civilisation, but that doesn't mean society at large is automatically getting smarter!

What can associations do to take on this societally invaluable role? Here are a few suggestions.

Encourage your Board to explicitly include this role in your Mission or advocacy strategy.

Constantly improve quality standards for your scientific papers, poster submissions, and educational products. Refuse substandard material: more is not better! And please don't ignore replication studies in favour of novel material, currently a huge problem in many fields.

Provide dedicated platforms for objective, evidence-based, expert-led debate on new theories and disputed conclusions. Remain open to the possibility of radical new concepts



(remember: Darwin's and Einstein's big ideas were hugely controversial for most biologists and physicists when first presented!).

Actively oppose "predatory" conference organizers and publishers, whose reckless, avaricious, quality-free business models damage the reputation of both bona-fide associations and scientific knowledge itself. It's not enough to ignore them!

Support and promote knowledge-enhancing initiatives that don't originate in your own organization. A great recent example is *The Datalab* at the University of Oxford, set up by Ben Goldacre, making huge datasets and analytical tools freely available for healthcare and scientific research.

Incorporate public awareness and education programmes into your agenda. We shouldn't just talk with each other, often using impenetrable jargon, safe inside our bubbles; we have to reach out to wider groups of citizens, many of whom are desperate for factual, reputable, reliable knowledge, communicated clearly.

ELITE ASSOCIATION GROUPINGS

Don't act alone! It's vital that leading associations in specialized fields obtain expert validation from their peers in neighbouring disciplines, who may not possess identical deep specialist knowledge, but who understand related scientific fields, who can endorse

the principles and practices in your certifications and curatorial processes. It's possible that elite association groupings such as *AC Forum* and the Washington DC-based *Healthcare Leadership Council* will play a bigger role in this validation process, helping to drive up knowledge-quality standards everywhere. I predict a big growth in these peer-to-peer "circles of excellence".

What are the roles in this undertaking that can be played by association-friendly cities such as the members of *Global Association Hubs*: Brussels, Dubai, Singapore and Washington DC? Firstly, we can encourage and facilitate our locally-based associations to come together and advance these issues. Secondly, we provide easy access to association-aware policymakers and institutions that are open to advocacy programmes in support of these objectives. And thirdly, we are already committed to stimulating a wider debate on the big issues that will determine the relevance and future success of the entire association sector.

And nothing is bigger than the struggle to reclaim the primacy of knowledge and expertise in this post-truth era.

Martin Sirk is International Advisor to *Global Association Hubs*, a partner to both Boardroom Media and to #Roadmap2030, the new platform for year-round discussion of the big issues that will shape the future world of associations.



Succeeding in transformation
association to be re
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FEATURE

The Challenges of Digital Transformation

As the economic – and sanitary – landscape continues to change, associations are experiencing a transformation in the way they do business and the way they engage with their stakeholders. The evolution of the digital world has challenged their traditional value proposition. But in what ways do associations need to embrace a digital mindset to remain competitive and bring added value to their members? The pandemic has undoubtedly changed the rules of the game, but to what extent? What are the tools out there at your disposal? What are your peers doing exactly? This is what this Boardroom Special Feature explores.

Digital Transformation as Strategic Growth

For AC Forum, **Isabel Bardinnet**, CEO of the European Society of Cardiology, and **Alessandro Cortese**, CEO of the European Society for Radiotherapy and Oncology, reflect on the digital transformation of their respective events from a strategic perspective – while different in nature and in scope, they may be converging.

The European Society for Cardiology (ESC) and the European Society for Radiotherapy and Oncology (ESTRO) are two medical Societies, based in Europe with global reach, whose commitment is to serve their respective communities with the curation and dissemination of the latest scientific content, education, and networking among peers, with the final purpose to improve care for the patients.

Both organizations have been growing over the years, with the annual congresses being the stronger driver for the financial development of the two Societies. In both cases the annual congress has represented, in the pre-pandemic phase, the main contributor to the finances of each organization, becoming an essential source of the resources necessary to sustain the respective scientific and professional communities.

In this context, the digitalization of several aspects of the life of the ESC and ESTRO had already started before the pandemic. However, when realizing that the sanitary scenario would not allow for live events in 2020, both organizations had to take quick decisions in troubled times, with little, if not inexistant, data to rely upon.

IDENTICAL REFLEX

The first part of the reaction was an identical reflex. Both the ESC and ESTRO realized that the scientific content was the main asset to evaluate and drive the changes. At the time of the acceptance of the limitation to organize a live event, both societies were in very advanced stages of their 2020 plans, with scientific programs finalized, industry sales in full steam, and registrations flowing around the traditional model of early, late and desk registrations, dictating the pace of attendees' responses.

And therefore, both Societies focused at first on adapting the scientific content to a digital distribution, with the understanding that scientific continuity would be the main value proposition for the communities in a year of professional seclusion. Both Societies adapted their governance to adopt a quicker chain of command, and both got organized to face the challenge of modelling scientific programs made of hundreds of sessions to the digital platforms.

In both cases the assumption was to maintain the value and the flavour of a congress, an event with strict rules for the scientific

content curation based on peer review, rather than adopting an alternative and simplified format of distribution of the content. This also allowed to maintain the respective systems of CME accreditations, as a crucial catalyzer, jointly with the quality of the scientific programs, for attendees' participation.

ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIC PATHWAYS

However, after the initially similar reflexes, the ESC and ESTRO adopted alternative strategic pathways, when it comes to adapting, or not, their respective business models.

The ESC embarked on a journey to value creation, looking at maximizing the benefits for its community, and with the intent to attract, via the digital format, larger audiences in addition to the one that already perceived the congress as the primary event in the discipline.

The radical decision was to not charge registration fees and to involve the industry with sponsored sessions, instead of the customary commercial exhibition, sustained by symposia.

Compared to 2019, the ESC saw a factorial growth of the attendance to the digital congress, with a strong global reach, also beyond Europe, and a double number of attendees in the earlier career stage.

The choice of investing in the growth of the community, gave birth to a novel perception by new groups of the professional benefit in attending the ESC congress. It created the conditions to look at 2021 with the potential to consolidate the growth and to aim at a potentially renewed and extended financial sustainability.

On a broader perspective, according to a survey conducted by the AC Forum within its member societies, only a handful of societies took the option of investing in the growth of the community, through a digital offer without fees in 2020. However, these Societies all witnessed a similar trend to retaining and an exponentially growing the community and the attendees.

Following a different pathway, ESTRO, by a combination of strategic options and financial imperatives, opted to maintain the traditional revenue model, adapting the fees to the digital format. In a short-term value capturing perspective, the fees were reduced to a ratio of 60% compared to the regular live event, and a strong effort was made to provide the industry with digital commercial opportunities, around the traditional formats of an exhibition and symposia.

The result of this approach was a digital congress attended by a little more than half of the attendees, compared to 2019, maintaining about half of the industry revenue, and generating about half of



the usual profit, therefore allowing to sustain with continuity most of the non-revenue generating activities of the Society.

Also, in the ESTRO case, a shift was observed with an increased number of attendees at a younger stage of their career, indicating that one of the results of the current phase may be the acceleration of change in the mix of attendees, potentially resulting in different consumeristic behaviours, also in medical communities.

SIMILAR OUTCOMES?

Besides this aspect, other outcomes of the digital events were similar. While the audiences adapted very efficiently to the online platforms and evaluated positively the availability and quality of the content, disseminated digitally, both communities stated that the value of live events could not be replaced, particularly considering the importance, for scientific communities, of professional networking.

Also, additional efforts need to be made to allow for interaction between the digital audience and the speakers, as well as between the persons attending the event.

When considering the perspectives for 2021, the ESC and ESTRO will be looking at building on the learnings and the experiences described in this article. As we write, there is little clarity about the perspectives of the vaccination plans, in Europe and globally.

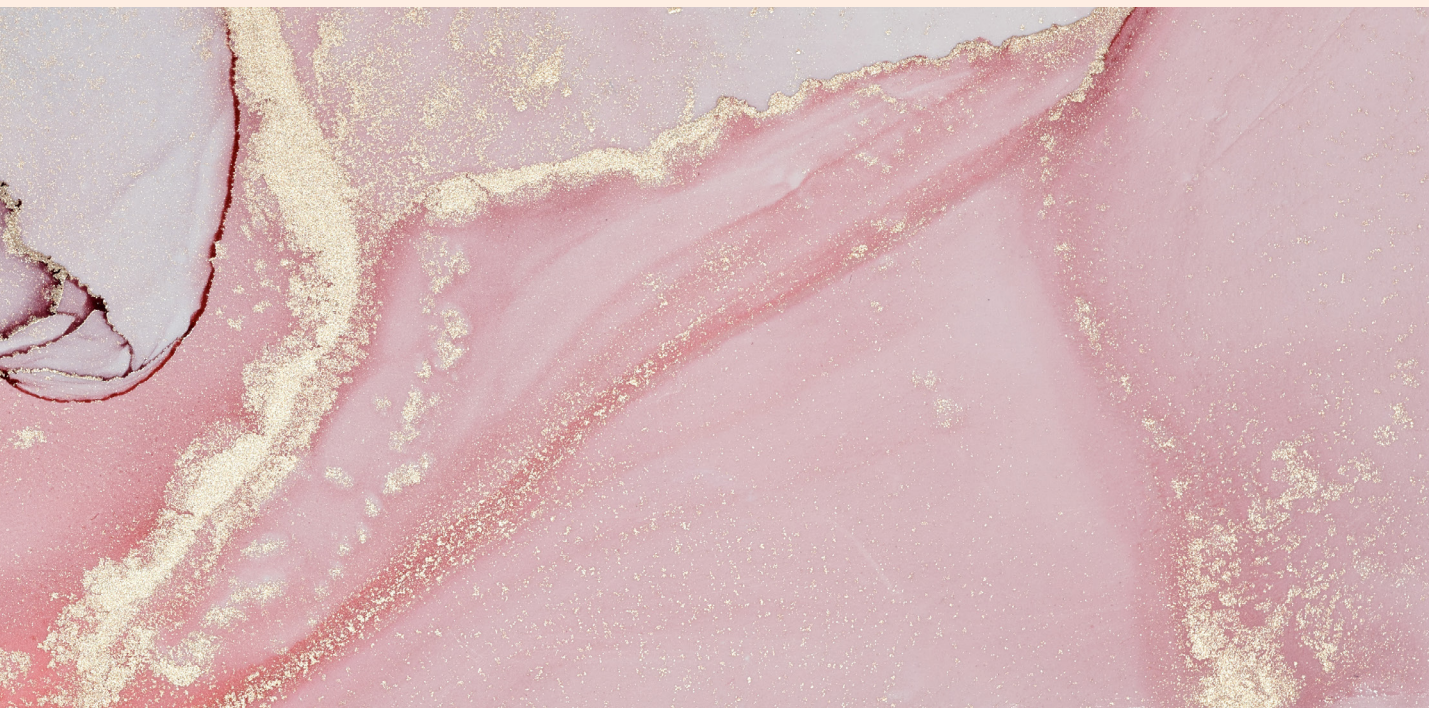
There is therefore no lucidity in predicting whether it will be possible to organize again live events in 2021, or not; and, if so, when.

Societies have therefore to make plans that incorporate the risks of a changing environment and must qualify the risks of this scenario.

ESTRO will try, if the pandemic allows it, to organize a live event at the end of summer, with the intent to blend digital audiences in its traditional model. The challenge, for this year, will be to attract again the complete community around the event, now designed to allow for the choice between a live or a digital registration, with a different pricing for each option.

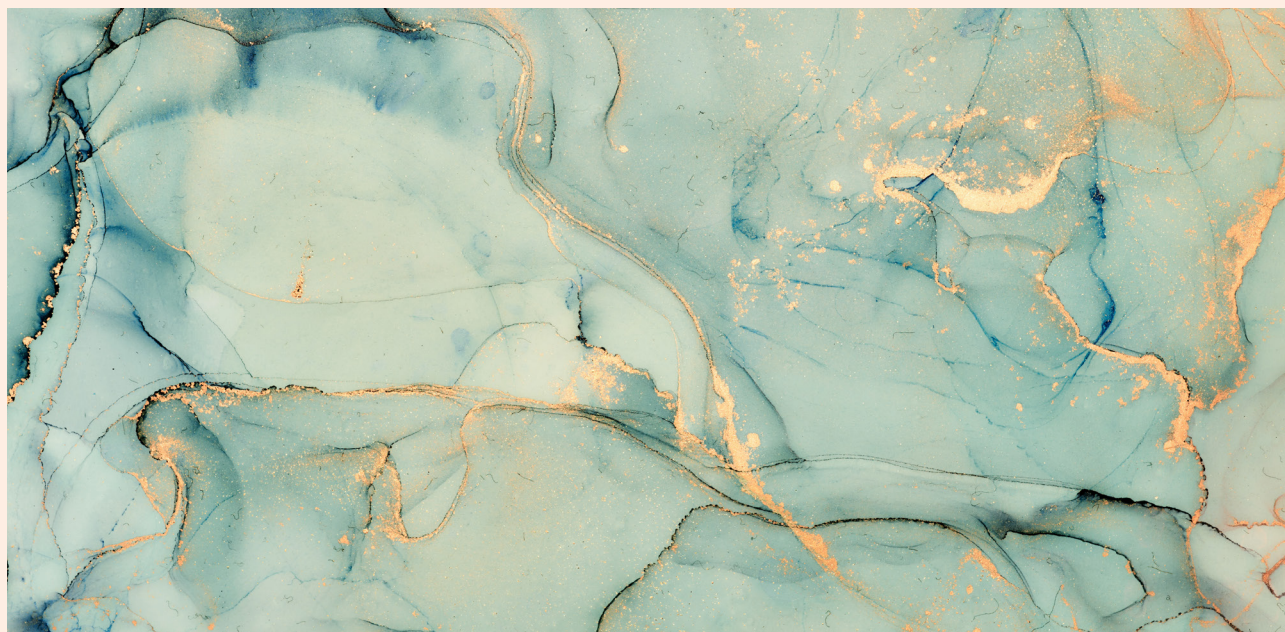
The ESC will try to capitalize on the value created in 2020 and will introduce registration fees for its digital experience, looking at converting the new community groups, attracted in 2020, into members and customers.

While, in the long run, the two approaches may well be converging into a similar evolution of the pre-COVID congress model, blending live and digital components, it will be interesting to observe whether the different choices adopted in 2020 will lead to different long terms results in terms of growth and retention of the communities served by the two Societies, with an important implication for their long-term relevancy.



How to Make Your Association Relevant Digitally

For ESAE, **Peter Van Roste**, General Manager at the Council of European National Top-Level Domain Registries (CENTR), shares his insights on how to continue to be relevant to your members as you go through your digital transformation.



In 2020 our associations were forced to change in ways some of us had already dreamt of but never could or dared to implement. Adapting to these extraordinary circumstances turned out to be easier than expected, but the consequences of those changes are far-reaching. Here are my top five tips for keeping your association relevant.

1. LOOK AT THE OPPORTUNITY COSTS OF 'DOING BUSINESS AS USUAL' AND REDIRECT RESOURCES

CENTR is an association of country code top-level domain managers (like .eu or .be). One would expect our association to have already been largely digital. But in 2019 we still held 18 large (international) physical meetings, we still had a spacious

office in the heart of the EU district, some of us still commuted long distances to work and we still had paper archives (HR & accounting). All of that has changed or will change.

2020 forced us to consider opportunity costs of how we have been running our operations.

When we look at the activities and processes that were affected in 2020, it is easy to quantify associated costs:

- International travel: 8% of budget and 10% of staff time
- Organizing events: 5% of budget and 15% of staff time
- Office: 6% of budget and 0.5 FTE
- Commute: +/- 1600 hours per year

What opportunities were lost because we were busy travelling, commuting or printing salary slips?

A first move would be to involve your whole team in the hunt for these opportunity costs. Not only will it assure buy-in, but it will also strengthen team cohesion and make every team member feel they have a real impact. For us, this exercise led to four focus points:

- We sped up the digitization of internal processes (accounting and HR) and implemented a range of online collaboration tools leading to location independence.
- We redirected time spent on travel to 1-2-1 outreach with members.
- Some of the time freed up is now dedicated to self-development and structured learning.
- We increased the efficiency of internal processes. Even marginal gains add up nicely.

2. PRIORITIZE MEMBERS' ENGAGEMENT

Losing the connection with members can have devastating effects on an association. Trust and goodwill are essential ingredients to get anything done. Whether we want to draft a response for a public consultation or get a collaborative R&D project off the ground, nothing beats meeting with a small group of willing members to get things moving.

In the absence of those physical meetings, we have decided to reach out in a structured way - wide and deep across the membership, from CEOs to operational level employees, something that will be done in the near future. That is a lot of calls, but well worth every single one of the 12,000 minutes we will spend on them. These calls serve a dual purpose: we keep our finger on the membership's pulse and we end up with a rich list of ideas for projects and services.

We have also organized online trainings for new employees from our members. As a result of them being online we reached four times more people than ever before. Satisfaction ratings for those trainings trend up compared to trainings given at our Brussels' office in 2019. Most importantly, by reaching out to these newcomers early on they become our ambassadors within the membership.

3. WIN THE RACE FOR TALENT: SPOIL YOUR TEAM NOW THAT YOU HAVE THE CHANCE

Don't let the chance of taking care of your team slip away. CENTR provided personal budgets for home offices, ergonomics coaches and surprise food baskets. We liberalized working hours entirely and put in place a training plan (10 days per year) for everyone.

And the best thing is that given the savings we made (see point 1) we still ended up with a budget and work time surplus.

All you have to do is manage expectations, make sure that the team understands that changes that don't work will be overhauled. Once the world goes back to normal, the time of quasi consequence-free experimentation will be over.

4. WITHIN YOUR TEAM, EXPERIMENT WITH REMOTE COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

Explore the world of online tools. Not only can this be a nice distraction from

daily routine, but it will provide you with an experience that is highly useful for your members too. At CENTR, our Board of Directors' simple instruction for our next (online) meeting is to make it the best meeting ever. In the process of achieving that, the whole team is pulling together.

However, one of the things we need to figure out is how we can improve the online experience for attendees. Trying out tools in the team not only increases everyone's familiarity with what's available these days, but also makes online interactions feel ever more natural. Costs are negligible compared with sending people to meetings abroad. For instance, you can meet in gather.town and collaborate on Trello, while engaging members and teams with Mentimeter.

What we are learning from these experiments is invaluable to our members. While leading the digitization of collaborative work, we have created a new service for our members: a know-how resource on effective collaboration.

5. MEASURE SERVICE QUALITY AND FINETUNE CONSTANTLY

After all, this is the thing that matters most. If your members had the choice between similar associations, would they pick you? The only way to know is to measure satisfaction rates regularly and react to the feedback instantaneously. Don't rely only on what they tell you, but keep track of all interactions with your members. Maintain the data and invest in accessible dashboards. A simple Tableau dashboard will awe your Board. And it will be your most reliable compass for the journey ahead.

Peter Van Roste is the General Manager of CENTR, the association for country code top level domain name managers. For more information about ESAE, with which Boardoom has an exclusive partnership, visit www.esae.eu



Begin Again

Associations Going Digital

According to **Louise Gorringe**, Director Association Management, Kenes Group, the events of the past twelve months have forced associations from viewing digitalization as a trend to recognizing it is as a necessity and enforcing it within a very short timeframe.

While the current situation has pushed many organizations into taking their first serious digital steps – in many cases moving an in-person meeting online – succeeding in transforming an association to be relevant online should be more than just a reaction – it must be a mindset. And a mindset which considers the whole association's mission and journey.

It is not about converting offline products and services to an online environment. In fact, a popular article on i-scoop.eu defines digital transformation as the acceleration of activities, processes, competencies and models to leverage the opportunities presented by technology and its impact in a strategic way. It's about value, people, optimization and the capability to rapidly adapt when needed. Being relevant digitally is about using the right tools for the right situation in support of the association's mission and goals, be it improving how the organization operates or increasing its value to members.

WHAT BENEFITS CAN THE DIGITALIZATION PROCESS DELIVER?

Reach – an organization can achieve a larger mark digitally than if limited to the physical environment. Many organizations successfully moved courses, webinars, events etc., into a digital format where there are no location restrictions. For participants, there are lower costs associated with attending, allowing those from different segments to take part, such as young professionals or those from lower-income groups.

New tools including translation and captioning allow for a better understanding by a wider audience of the content itself. Marketing automation allows for tailored messages to different targets. AR and VR developments enable the live experience to be recreated better in a digital environment, opening the doors to safe and more practical simulation-based education.

Connections – while developments are still pending, technology is allowing peer-to-peer conversations without barriers, supporting co-creation through community platforms, live chats, or collaborative suites.

Engagement – both internally by supporting communication with the association's board and stakeholders through closed platforms and tools such as Teams, Slack etc., and externally, by increasing member engagement through AI and customized communication delivered in different formats.

Data – everything can be measured online, so delivering deep insights can aid the decision making of associations, and CRM systems can keep track of members, funders, partners and their behaviour.

Automation – simplifying processes for both the association and its members, providing efficiencies and protecting those all-important association resources can be done with mindful use of communication, social media, CRM and other tools or apps that can streamline workflows.

WHERE TO START?

It may feel like a daunting task for associations to know where to start and so it is critical to:

Develop a digitalization strategy which should be interwoven with the wider association strategy.

Take a stepped approach, rolling changes in a planned way, using data and insight to evaluate outcomes and adapt along the way.

Think long-term, as what works now won't be relevant in a short space of time, requiring a review of how products and services are designed, developed and managed, but most importantly continuously evolved.

Structure for success. Growing an organization into its digital skin is fundamentally a disruptive process and requires a shift change in the way teams work and decisions are taken. Associations are not best known for their innovative style and embracing such a change may require a complete rethink of the internal mechanisms and culture.

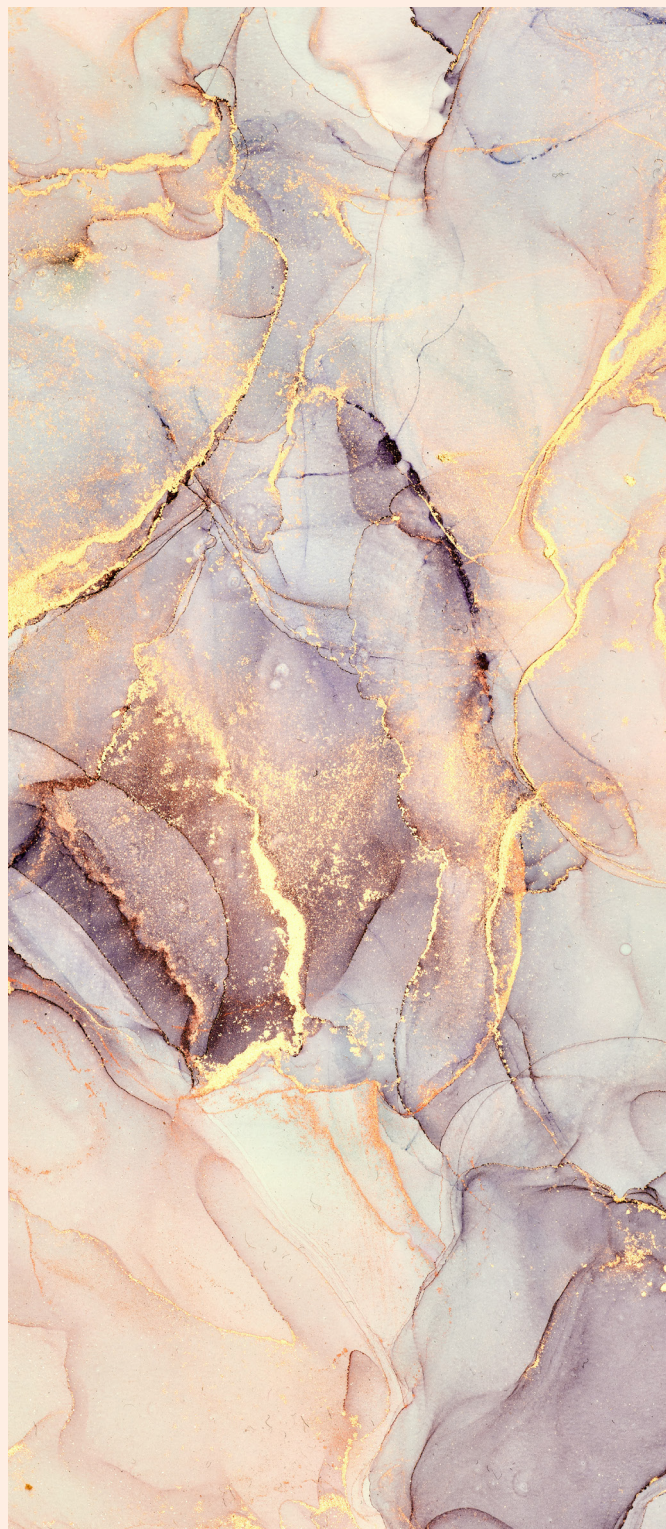
In our work with medical and scientific societies, the first step of many was to move their education offer online, which is a central part of any association's mission. Healthcare providers face an increasingly complex array of pressures, with one of the top being lifelong learning and maintaining their expertise. Due, however, to the lack of time that everyone experiences today, and with the current difficulties to meet face-to-face, online education is simply crucial.

Social media gave the kick to the online life of many organizations, creating a ripple effect, such as extending the timeframe of engagement after an event to a continuous year-round conversation. The digital world compliments the impact and effectiveness of face-to-face events and, especially in a time where such a contact suddenly became obsolete, online came to the rescue in order for science to continue.

For an association to be relevant online, the board must provide quality content, deliver it by using the right technology and wrap it all up with a strategy to engage the community throughout the year.

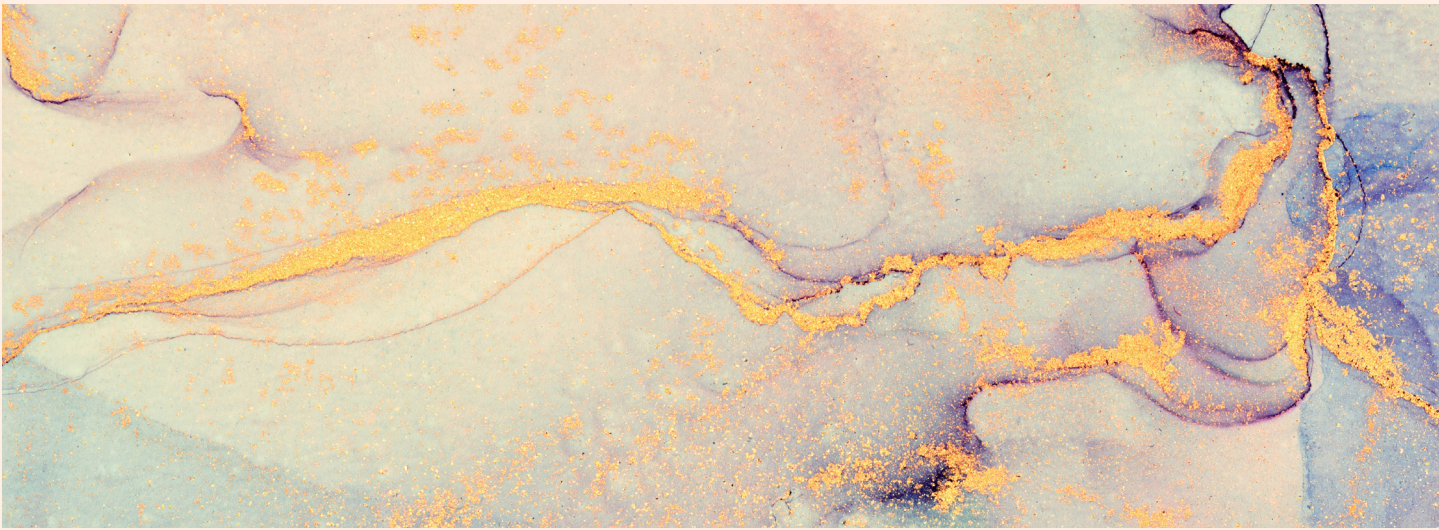
Because if content was always the king, the delivery is the new reigning queen, then the community is the kingdom.

This article was provided by the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers, author Louise Gorringer, Director Association Management Operations, Kenes Group (www.kenes.com). IAPCO represents today 137 companies comprised of over 9,900 professional congress organisers, meeting planners and managers of international and national congresses, conventions and special events from 40 countries info@iapco.org \ www.iapco.org



Pushing the Right Button

Sven Bossu, CEO of AIPC, argues that connectivity, inclusiveness, and experiments are the three essential pillars of digital transformation. If they focus on those, associations will remain relevant to their members.



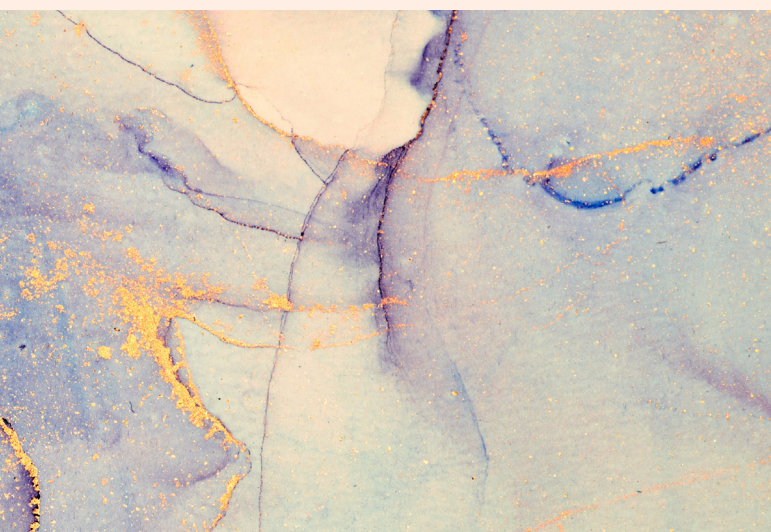
Like many of you, I had my share of digital experiences over the last twelve months - both as participant and organizer. And systematically, the experience improved. Evolving technology definitely played a role, but even more important was the fact that we recognize this new world for what it is and not for what we wish it to be.

The world of associations is facing an entire suite of disruptions, with the pandemic being the imminent but not the only one. Technology, geopolitics, changing member behavior, new business models, climate change... all of these have an impact on the way associations function. As a result, continuous change will be the new normal and associations will need to be extremely agile. Digital can play a very important role in making this happen.

THE PURPOSE OF ASSOCIATIONS

The starting point for making this successful is to carefully look at the purpose of our associations. And despite all the disruptions we face, the purpose of the association is the one thing which did not change. Medical associations still want to improve the life of patients, technology associations still want to create a smarter world and business associations still want to stimulate trade. What is it up for change is how we do this and what we provide to our members in terms of products and services.

Let us take the case of my association, AIPC. It is our mission to bring venue management worldwide to the next level by providing professional education, developing quality standards and performing research which feeds into our other activities. And though it is counter-intuitive - AIPC represents event venues



- I do believe digital technology will be of key importance to achieve the objectives related to our mission.

First of all, digital allows for connectivity in a world where travel is challenging. And although Zoom does not even come close to a face-to-face experience, it does allow to talk to peers, share knowledge and take comfort from the fact that you are not alone in facing the challenges ahead. Associations can really make a difference by making these encounters meaningful, either from a content point of view or from a participant point of view. This is really the moment to carefully look at the different audiences your associations serve and to distinguish the different needs those audiences have. In the case of AIPC, the roll out of our CRM platform allowed to distinguish those audiences and identify their requirements.

Some of those audiences remained unserved until now, because - for example in the case of young high potentials - they could not make it to the AIPC events. Which brings me to the second opportunity: increase of reach, allowing the association to be more inclusive. Not only will this allow the association to spread its message on a wider scale, but it also allows to capture voices unheard till now which enriches the conversation within the associations. Translating this input into output, amplified via digital channels, allows the community to grow - both in numbers and in impact.

And thirdly, digital allows to (and sometimes forces us to) experiment. Sharing these experiments with your members - sometimes successfully, sometimes... well, less successfully - allows to learn as a group. This is the moment to be bold and try things which you would not have imagined before - and by being open and transparent on the experimental nature, it is likely your members will get on board and take the journey with you. It will be like a cooking class. And as we know, it is this types of journey which creates long lasting friendships.

EVEN MORE RELEVANT

Connectivity, inclusiveness, and experiments - digital does allow for all of this and will make your association even more relevant. And the good thing is that there is no single solution, and it does not require a Harry Potter like wand to make it happen. Each and every association can put digital to work for its community by taking the needs of its members as a starting point.

However, there is one pitfall to avoid. Digital is something completely different than face-to-face. Things which have proven very successful in the physical world, might be completely irrelevant in the digital world. Theatre is not the same thing as a television show - it requires a different approach, different management, and different skills. And the same goes for digital for associations: to make it successful, we need to change our mindset. Take the digital reality for what it is, not for what you wish it to be. And have fun testing it out. To paraphrase one of my favorite actors - John Le Mesurier - it will all be rather lovely.

This article was contributed by Sven Bossu, CEO of AIPC, with which Boardroom has a special partnership. AIPC represents a global network of over 190 leading centres in 64 countries with the active involvement of more than 1000 management-level professionals worldwide. www.aipc.org

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Experience The Future Conference

The pandemic has threatened the very core of the meetings industry. Fact. Associations and destinations alike have responded to the best of their ability, learning new lessons with every new obstacle. Fact. Hidden opportunities lie within this worldwide ordeal. Fact. But is the world, and our industry in particular, looking in the right direction for these promising changes that everyone is talking about? Have conference destinations decrypted what delegates will be craving for once we are let out of our cages, what it takes to make travelling around the globe worthwhile again?

Words & Interviews Vicky Koffa, with Remi Deve



A common question after a meeting is "What was your conference experience like?". Until recently, what the questioner wanted to know was whether the fellow attendee found the sessions they followed informative and varied, whether knowledge was shared adequately, and workshops produced innovative ideas. And of course if the experience brought new collaborations, new friendships... and if the serendipity factor was there for everybody to enjoy. This is why academics, scientists and experts travelled endlessly.

This knowledge economy was forced to reinvent itself because of the pandemic. Taking travelling out of the equation has admittedly opened vast digital possibilities for learning, but on the downside, it has made - for some - all this knowledge a bit sterile, lacking the excitement of sharing an experience in person while exchanging ideas. This is where the experience

economy gains the upper hand and what the post-pandemic era of business events should focus on. In this regard, Christian Woronka, director of the [Vienna Convention Bureau](#), confirms that: "An experience can elevate a convention or event, providing further dimensions and igniting greater creativity."

THE EXCITING NEW WORLD OF ONLINE MEETINGS

2020, and probably for its most part 2021, have taught even the most 'traditional' delegate that online meetings work. After some initial bumps, associations realized that with some creativity, open-mindedness and the right technology they can still offer their members advanced education and training. In fact, it is more advantageous compared to physical meetings as knowledge can be more customized,

more accessible, cheaper and definitely reaching a larger audience.

"Post-event surveys and interviews confirmed that we had all done a great job: attendance figures were what we had hoped for (or even higher depending on our business model), association brands and values reached new audiences untethered by the expense and inconvenience of travel, commercial partners also got their visibility and most importantly of all, the content we had all been diligently curating and collating for months on end was effectively delivered in a multitude of innovative digital formats," says Ben Hainsworth, Managing Director of the [European Association for the Study of the Liver](#).

However, the argument that the value of networking cannot be found online is a real one as Bettina Reventlow-Mourier, Deputy Convention Director of [Wonderful Copenhagen](#), explains: "Meaningful and rewarding connections can be started in the online realm - particularly by the young generations whose behaviors are born in a digital culture. Whereas virtual community interaction can provide valuable reach, inclusion and data for the association, it is undeniably more difficult for the delegates, sponsors and exhibitors to build up new relationships and trust virtually." And Aileen Crawford, Head of [Glasgow Convention Bureau](#), supports this thought with facts: "81% of associations, responding to a recent ICCA survey believe that there are limitations to networking discussions at virtual events, compared to face-to-face meetings."

Is this entirely true? Can an association overcome this meaningful 'networking issue' and, if yes, to what extent? Malgosia Bartosik, Deputy CEO of [WindEurope](#), argues: "What people seem to like about the online networking/ B2B Platforms is the fact that you can do it in a very targeted way. If you manage to get the right information on participants to build clear profiles and understand their needs, the matchmaking can be really effective. We can shape the groups of people that want to be connected to each other." And this is just the beginning; the future of online events looks promising.

THE IN-BETWEEN SOLUTION

And yet we can argue that organizers cannot cover all needs digitally. Delegates are already tired from watching one-sided presentations and the need to combine knowledge with a memorable moment, an out-of-work experience, has to be created. A more dynamic way of attending a conference seems to be the hybrid format. So far, many convention bureau have stepped in to integrate fun videos and personalized interactive experiences linked to the destination or partner destinations with shorter educational sessions.

"Hybrid events will play a larger role than prior to the pandemic, as it provides organizers greater access and reach to engage with broader audiences than ever before. The 'experience' element might be more restricted, but meeting designs will continue to adapt, becoming more dynamic and creative, with a shift from long, one-dimensional presentations, to more inspirational, TED TALK style presentations," notices Woronka.

As best results come from partnership and collaboration, Bartosik goes further saying: *"The collaboration between different cities could be of big value for hybrid events. If we could connect different studios around the world, we could have delegates connecting from various destinations; that could be a nice addition to the onsite event, making it different and more appealing than just direct streaming."*

NOTHING LIKE HUMAN CONTACT

All parties interviewed for this piece agree on this. The digital world has stepped up in a time of need, *"it made us discover all the potential of online events in order to disseminate content and we will keep using this potential, but real human interactions allow us to challenge this content, our ideas and create fruitful connections and partnerships for the future,"* says Elisabeth Van Ingelgem, Director [visit.brussels Association & Convention Bureau](#).

Association members are now looking to get something more out of the conference





they attend. Human interaction, networking, is called to provide excitement and sharing memorable moments with other like-minded attendees all while acquiring new knowledge. *"Delegates will want to personalize their own conference experience around these networking opportunities,"* says Crawford. Physical conferences are the ideal platform for this rising need, for the experience economy, which comes to reinforce the knowledge economy.

Experiencing creates value on an individual level during a physical event; this is why association members will leave the comfort of their home and travel the globe again. In fact, as Hainsworth says, *"getting away from work, temporarily immersing yourself in a new environment and concentrating on learning and sharing things that you are passionate about remains a uniquely rewarding experience."*

CVBS TO THE RESCUE

Clearly, the future conference has to be different. The pandemic has taught us the importance of community and environment. Conferences will need to offer more value on all fronts - knowledge, experience, society, environment. What better way to do this than aligning the organization of an event with the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)? And who better to help with this than the city convention bureaus?

"The new business model must be able to give the best service and strategic support to associations, organizers and delegates and be adapted to the new normal. The local stakeholders and suppliers are playing an essential role for the destination and its clients. Safety, security, creating confidence and the best economic outcome will be key in the future for associations/organizers selecting destinations for their events," says Christoph Tessmar, Director of [Barcelona Convention Bureau](#).

Associations ask for *"proper, targeted, purpose-made meetings that combine both business and local experience with the highest ROI,"* according to Bartosik. *"Could we*

move part of the event's meetings to the city? An offer of different type of meetings, of different sizes and formats, and the support of someone to help us make it happen, that could definitely add an extra value to the event," she says.

And Reventlow-Mourier answers: *"Between associations, CVBs and PCOs it could be interesting bringing together the creative and technological industries, experience designers and producers to engineer and curate solutions as to how best we can design and implement pre-meeting setups, flexible and innovative meeting spaces, interactive conference programmes - both on- and off-site - that provide the optimal environment for nudging people together, facilitate networking, encourage relation building and allow for great serendipitous encounters."*

CVBs will take their place in the spotlight, *"not as a blank canvas, but more fully mobilized as the temporary home and guardian of the visiting community,"* says Hainsworth. The idea finds CVBs ready for action. Crawford says: *"Convention Bureaux have long been experts within the knowledge economy, advocating the benefits of knowledge exchange and internationalization; now the city convention bureau can take its place within the experience economy; putting the 'work' back into 'networking'."*

There is a catch though; in order to fully satisfy the future delegate all this exciting new type of event needs to respect - and give back - to the community, socially and environmentally. Finding ways to reduce their carbon footprint, or at the very least, including it in a greater cause, will have to be at the forefront of every event. *"Future delegates will expect navigating barriers to entry, reducing risk for delegates visiting at their own expense, even looking at the circular economy and developing more genuine experiences,"* says Hainsworth. Creating legacy and positive impact will have to start from early stages of conference bidding and planning and include environmentally friendly solutions across the board.

Meeting Postcards from Japan

As you would expect, Japan Convention Bureau, under the umbrella of the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), went all online for their yearly event targeted at meeting planners, Meet Japan. The educational famtrip took place in several segments late January-early February and was designed to showcase Japan and its many cities as safe and knowledgeable conference destinations. In this regard, it didn't disappoint: Boardroom notably learned all about the 18th World Congress on Lung Cancer (WCLC) which took place in October 2017 in Yokohama and took a virtual stroll in Osaka.

Words Remi Deve

Pronounce the word 'Japan' and images of snow-capped mountains in the North, pine-clad islands in the South, refined people living in cool cities combining traditions and modernity like no other, will immediately conjure up. In fact, coming to Japan and being in touch with Japanese people brings planners and delegates in contact with the imagination and intelligence of the country. This unique mix leads to new ways of thinking and triggers experiential insights hard to find anywhere else, as the country, along a strong academic community, has for a long time been a leading force for research and development in many industries - from engineering and pharmaceuticals to robotics, finance and IT.

Aiming to be the leading meetings destination in Asia by 2030 and already looking beyond the 2020 Olympics which will take place this year (after last year's postponement due to the COVID-19 pandemic) Japan boasts one of the largest national memberships within many international associations, in addition to a great record of hosting successful international association events. This is partly due to the efforts of Japan Convention Bureau, which identifies conferences that are aligned with the country's key industries and sectors.

LUNG CANCER IN YOKOHAMA

In this context, no wonder Japan hosted the 18th World Congress on Lung Cancer (WCLC) in Yokohama in October 2017. Held at PACIFICO Yokohama and themed "Synergy to Conquer Lung Cancer", the world's largest meeting dedicated to this unfortunately widespread disease attracted about 7,000 delegates from around the globe: over the course of four days, medical doctors, scientists, nurses, health professionals, government officials, partners from the industry, health advocacy groups and patients came together in order to obtain and exchange information on advances in the management of lung cancer and other thoracic malignancies, while considering both global and regional aspects.

"Initially we didn't know which Japanese city would be the best fit for this conference and JNTO was great in shortlisting cities based on our requirements and introducing us to the respective convention bureaus and centres," explains Mathias Posch, President of ICS, a company which has just celebrated 40 years of successfully organizing meetings. "Yokohama Convention & Visitors Bureau and PACIFICO Yokohama Convention Centre worked together closely to deliver a competitive bid and arrange the site visit according to our needs. They also collected information on funding options available and were able to provide some funding through the Bureau as well as point us in the



PACIFICO YOKOHAMA

right direction in term of funding from the National Science Council. Throughout the process they introduced us to suppliers and were collaborative in coming up with solutions to some of our challenges."

Posch was quick in praising Japan as a conference destination, fondly remembering the wonderful hospitality and great service they experienced at every stage of the event. He says: *"For conferences especially, Japan has been engaged in many international associations in a leading capacity and there is great pride in hosting international conferences – we therefore see great attendance and local industry involvement when we organize an international conference in Japan. In addition, Japan offers a safe and clean environment, easy access from around the globe and has a great reputation for excellent hospitality – all these things make it very easy to attract delegates to the destination. We also usually see an uptick in attendance from all over Asia due to the same reasons."*

ICONIC MEETING DESTINATIONS

Meet Japan was also the occasion for the virtual delegates to tour some of Japan's iconic meeting destinations. They actually did a good job making sure we knew all about the varied conference infrastructures and the latest developments of the business event industry in the country.

In Osaka, I was particularly interested to learn about Yumeshima, which translates as "Dream Island." Yumeshima will not only be the site of the 2025 World Expo but a candidate to host Japan's first casino resort. The plans for the 390-hectare island will add two more magnets pulling foreign visitors to a city and region already enjoying an unprecedented tourism boom – as is Japan overall – partly due to an easing of visa restrictions for Chinese tourists. In that regard, Osaka, which is already well-loved for its cuisine and welcoming citizens, is set to become one of the biggest tourist draws in East Asia.

The theme of the 2025 World Expo is 'Designing Future Society', with a focus on health and sustainability, reflecting Osaka's effort to develop new industries in medical tourism and green energy. An opportunity for countries to showcase ideas and innovation, Expos take place every five years and Osaka's will run from May to November 2025. It is targeting 28m visitors – roughly a quarter of the population of Japan. Yumeshima has been thought out as an integrated resort: it will boast thousands of hotel rooms and a conference centre.

More information on Japan as a conference destination
www.japanmeetings.org

Copenhagen Legacy Lab

A True Partnership Across the Entire Meetings Eco-system

The concept of legacy and long-lasting positive impact is certainly not a new one; it has been on the lips of the entire meetings industry for quite a few years already. But the pandemic has given it new dimensions, it has amplified the necessity to use a systematic model according to which associations are given the right tools to achieve their mission towards the community. Copenhagen's Legacy Lab has managed to cover this need and give new purpose to association conferences.

Interview Vicky Koffa

The initiative was launched in 2019 bringing associations and destinations closer than ever under the same umbrella of achieving common goals, mainly serving the communities involved, and sometimes even the international community. It focuses on a more strategic set of ideas and guidelines, based mostly on extensive partnerships between local stakeholders and associations, with the objective of contributing to the broader societal value of association meetings. Copenhagen Legacy Lab (CLL) has kept on top of the international situation and is already looking into the future, as our interview with Bettina Reventlow-Mourier, Deputy Convention Director at Wonderful Copenhagen, reveals.

Has CLL achieved the initial goals you set out for it? Do you find that associations are starting to grasp the importance of having such a concrete tool at their disposal?

The launch and workshop at BestCities Global Forum in Copenhagen in December 2019 were a big success and the same goes for the coverage of the publication and workshop tools, which were shared with the meetings industry during the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) Congress a few months ago. Our goals have certainly been met, despite the pandemic and the challenges it brought about. The legacy processes on a couple of our congresses were delayed as they were cancelled or postponed, but we continue undeterred.

As for associations, the timing to start considering legacy as a part of their congress models is really good, since the entire industry is changing radically at the moment. And there is a growing interest

indeed. Making use of the tools we offer requires associations to enter into a new type of collaborative partnerships with us as the destination. Something we all need to practice on and a part of the journey we are really enjoying and looking forward to expanding.

Can you give examples of associations which have already benefited from your proposition and the activities they used to reach their legacy goals?

We managed to attract the European Society for Radiotherapy and Oncology (ESTRO) to Copenhagen because of the legacy element in the bid. ESTRO's vision towards 2030 is 'Optimal Health for All, Together' and the aim of the congress, as well as that of the Danish host group, is to enhance multidisciplinary collaboration across Europe. Some of the activities that are being developed to reach this goal are a series of guidelines on multidisciplinary collaboration, a European policy to bring down waiting lists by organizing a multi stakeholder learning framework and a series of virtual seminars by 29 Danish working groups, who share their experiences with interdisciplinary research.

The other congress we are currently working with is WindEurope Electric City, which will take place this year. The shared vision of this event is to promote wind energy as a cornerstone and a key component of the global energy transition. To achieve this, we have mobilized a large and varied stakeholder group. Some of the activities include an Intergovernmental Forum, Talent Attraction and Talent Development initiatives and an Innovation Park.

WindEurope are thrilled, as the process of viewing their event through a legacy lens enables them to extract new types of value never before realized.

Is the initiative always work in progress?

Yes, it is and it must never become static. We have received funding from Copenhagen Municipality for the next four years, which helps us to further develop our products. Broader partnerships with relevant stakeholders in Denmark and deeper partnerships with international organizations in the industry, like BestCities - an alliance of twelve cities - and The Iceberg - an online platform focused on legacy, are definitely in our plans.

To keep the project relevant, we also plan to develop tools to do legacy processes virtually and go deeper with the integration of the UN SDGs. And then there is the measurement of the impacts of strategic legacy planning, which is the probably single most important area to develop. We are already working with MeetDenmark and Gaining Edge - a consulting company for the industry - in measuring our current congresses and have also contributed to the BestCities report on measuring.

Where do you see the initiative go from here?

I do hope that the initiative will serve as an inspiration for both associations and destinations, and that many more associations will embrace legacy work as part of their strategic congress methodology. We are here to help them achieve their congress goals and at the same time get their input as to how the initiatives can continue to improve. Only in this way can we ensure, that the Copenhagen Legacy Lab keeps evolving and stays relevant.

More information on www.copenhagencvb.com

Did you know that...?

1. Copenhagen Legacy Lab can help you fulfil your legacy mission in four simple and concrete steps:

- Goal setting
- Local stakeholder engagement
- Co-creation
- Legacy activity development and implementation

2. Major Associations are currently implementing the process:

- International Water Association (IWA) 2022
- ESTRO 2022
- WindEurope Electric City 2021
- ESPGHAN 2022

3. Concrete tools for long-lasting impact are now more than ever necessary so as to:

- Create and capture more value from the meeting
- Respond to the climate crisis by unfolding the full potential of business events
- Generate a stronger purpose for current and new members
- Strengthen the value of face-to-face meetings
- Acquire the right tools for knowledge dissemination through cross-sectorial alliances



It's the People Who Will Drive Recovery

As we look back on the past twelve months, it's hard to believe everything that has happened. New presidencies, global protests and a pandemic – to name but a few. This period has taken its toll on the event industry but, as we speak to the Scottish Event Campus' Director of Operations, Mark Laidlaw, we recognize that it is the people of the industry who will drive its recovery.

Words Lindsay Ackers



Since the beginning of the outbreak the Scottish Event Campus (SEC), along with several other venues around the world, was called upon to support the country's health services as it fought COVID-19. Venues and their operations teams are all too familiar with quick turnarounds, ever changing event set-ups and complying with local and national regulations, but this was different.

"At face value to a member of the industry, the hospital was a slightly larger and more complex 'event' that the team had to manage. But we need to look deeper at just how this impressive feat of collaboration came to fruition to understand the silver lining that will benefit the industry in its recovery," Laidlaw comments.



OPERATIONAL WITHIN THREE WEEKS

For context, the NHS Louisa Jordan currently occupies the SEC Centre – the heart of the Scottish Event Campus. It was operational within less than three weeks and has since treated over 19,000 non-COVID-19 patients, trained more than 5,500 NHS staff and is now assisting with the national vaccination programme – with the first nurse in Glasgow receiving her vaccine at the centre in December.

"One of the biggest challenges for the team was the unknown – as we all know, by the time a client comes on site, we know them well and we know their event like the back of our hand. This was different. There were teams from the British Army and even competing building firms all working to a plan that was ever evolving – and no one had met each other.

"The first three weeks were an incredible example of how people from all kinds of environments and holding different skillsets can come together to work towards a common goal. It took time to recognize and understand what each group could bring to the project but this really highlighted how highly skilled event professionals are. As in any venue, the event team know the logistics, supply chain and day to day operation of the building better than anyone. It simply could not have been done without them," he continues.

At the end of the initial build, it was clear that it was now one, cohesive team working towards something of huge national importance. This was made clear by the moving farewell to the building contractors given by the NHS staff as the facility was handed over to them to run.

"Seeing the first teams be clapped through the venue was like nothing we had seen before. It was a beautiful show of gratitude and gave the SEC team a huge boost for the next stage – reinforcing that what they were doing was so important for Scotland," said Laidlaw.

NEXT PHASE

The next phase of the project saw the NHS take over and run the facility – meaning more unknowns for the SEC. As before, it was a totally new team, new counterparts, new contacts – like changing to a brand-new client halfway through an event.

"The team took this in their stride and once again, the skills that come from being in the event industry shone through. The ability to work in such a fluid and fast paced environment with ever changing plans and being able to turn your hand to any task that needs doing is testament to our industry," he added.

It is this combination of flexibility and resilience that makes our industry so unique. The past months have been sobering and eye-opening for the SEC team, but more than anything, Mark notes a drive and determination to return to events, and a relentless energy to deliver.

"The team, as I'm sure many are around the world, are itching to get back to events. They have missed working closely with their clients to deliver events which make positive impacts in their sector. They have missed the buzz of a busy campus and the quick builds and breakdowns. This energy is going to bring a breath of fresh air and reassurance to clients who have waited so patiently for their next event to happen.

"We've been talking about technology, health and safety measures and phenomenal government lobbying efforts to bring events back, but in reality, it's the people, the energy and the drive that are really going to make the difference in the long run. That's not to say that they didn't exist before – of course they did – but as we know, absence makes the heart grow fonder and, in this instance, our team's heart is bursting to bring the industry back to life."

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WHAT WILL NEXT-GENERATION EVENTS LOOK LIKE?



Technological advances, environmental awareness and changing consumer behaviour are pushing businesses to transform across the event industry. Another layer of complexity was added by the outbreak of COVID-19.

To stay ahead of the game, innovation, adaptability, and collaboration are key in responding to disruption. The need for event organisers to come together to connect, exchange knowledge, gain insights and build lasting relationships has therefore never been greater.

Whether you are an event coordinator, a member of the event or marketing department, or a start-up with groundbreaking ideas, be sure to get in touch.

**LET'S SHAPE OUR FUTURE
TOGETHER!**

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THE CONVERSATION:
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A Global Reset in Singapore

As the business events industry prepares for gradual recovery, some destinations move faster than others. Singapore, which has been known for its forward-looking and strategic positioning for some years now, seems to be ahead of the game. When it hosted the Global Broadcast Center of PCMA Convening Leaders last January, it showed the world that it is ready to host meetings once again – in very strict conditions, quite understandably. Boardroom Chief Editor Remi Deve was lucky enough to be part of the physical trip – the first international one in over a year.

Words Remi Deve

The meetings industry has always been a key driver of Singapore's growth, and there is a strong industry interest in and demand for business events. As it cannot survive on just its domestic market, there is an urgency for the city-state to host international meetings of any type and format. As Asia's Greenest City, Singapore may also be one of the most densely populated countries on the globe—with 5.6 million people calling the tiny, 724-square-kilometer island home—and it's proving to be a major player in the reset of business events, in the safest environment possible.

END-TO-END SERVICE

To do so, a whole protocol has been put in place, referred to as an "end-to-end service," as Trade and Industry Minister Chan Chun Sing put it in a recent interview with The Straits Times. Events with up to 250 attendees are possible and intended to open the doors to holding others on an even larger scale. Organizers wishing to plan an event in Singapore must demonstrate the ability to implement safe management measures, which include limiting overall density of attendees and having infection control measures before and after the event.

In this context, TravelRevive was, last October, the first international travel tradeshow to take place physically in Asia Pacific during COVID-19, with both local and foreign attendees and exhibitors. The event attracted close to 1,000 attendees onsite, of which about 65 were foreign delegates from 14 countries in Asia, Middle East and Europe. In this context, Singapore Tourism Board (STB) is committed to supporting the transformation of the meetings industry, as it pivots and adapt to new event formats and business models to stay relevant.

"For trade shows, face-to-face engagement and negotiations are important to build networks and to create business opportunities. But these can be hard to achieve via virtual platforms," explains Dr Edward Koh, Executive Director, Conventions, Meetings & Incentive Travel, STB. "Nonetheless, hybrid elements in physical events can still offer opportunities for event organizers. For example, a hybrid format will likely allow them to secure more prestigious keynote speakers who would normally not attend physically. Virtual platforms are also able to reach an extensive global audience, unlocking new market potential, e.g. virtual audiences who are unable to attend in person. This is exactly what we tried to achieve by hosting, at and with Marina Bay Sands, the Global Broadcast Center of PCMA Convening Leaders."



QUITE SUCCESSFUL

To this extent, PCMA Convening Leaders was quite successful. Though the networking was quite a challenge to be honest, with delegates not being able to network outside of their designated zone, the organization was flawless and the content of high-quality.

While PCMA CEO Sherrif Karamat, who joined the main stage as a hologram, reminded the audience that associations are in a unique place to drive recovery with them being *"the main providers of life-long learning,"* STB CEO Keith Tan argued that *"this pandemic has taught us how to be ready for the future, as we continue to experiment, create alternative models that hopefully will allow us to face any challenges, contingencies and scenarios the upcoming months and years might bring us."*

Shirlena Soh, President of the Singapore-based Association of Biomedical Professionals, who was present during a panel on the relevance of associations, doesn't think otherwise. She said: *"As an association, all we're interested in is bridging the gap between research and application, knowledge transfer and the sharing of best practice as well as challenges. As most associations need guidance in Asia, I believe an event like PCMA Convening Leaders in Singapore can only but show them the way forward."*

In that sense, Singapore Tourism Board and Marina Bay Sands surely made quite an impact. And this was precisely what the original intention was. As Paul Town, Senior Vice President, Resort Operations, Marina Bay Sands, put it, *"we're here to help make sure organizations are impactful. We want to be inspiring and provide the best technology, like that our state-of-the-art broadcast studio, so that associations can fulfill their mission and vision."*

"Beyond the tangible economic benefits, we see meetings as central to our position as a global business hub and key node within Asia. Business events facilitate the exchange of knowledge, ideas and capital, allows us to attract more investment opportunities, and builds leadership in Singapore's key industry clusters," Dr Edward Koh concludes. *"We remain confident in the long-term prospects of Singapore's tourism and MICE sectors. The fundamentals that make Singapore a key meetings hub and attractive location for business and leisure events remain unchanged, and our industry is resilient. This puts us in a good position to emerge stronger from COVID-19."*

More information

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