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LETTER TO OUR READERS

What the Future Holds

As 2024 winds down, many of us are already trying to get ahead of the curve for 2025. We scour our news feeds and are bombarded with headlines like “The Future of Associations Will Look Like *This*” or “Association Leader Predicts the Future of Work.” Experts, gurus, and CEOs are all making predictions—sometimes contradictory.

But how can we know which of them truly has the insight? The truth is, nobody has a crystal ball. Predicting the future has always been one of humanity’s favorite pastimes, from reading ancient omens in the stars to interpreting the flight of birds. Even Nostradamus, with all his cryptic writings, would probably have had an easier time if he could have simply flipped a coin! Complexity, however, doesn’t guarantee accuracy.

The reality is that we can’t predict everything—if not anything—, especially in a world moving as fast as ours. But there are trends worth watching.

At Boardroom, we’re seeing how digital transformation and AI are not just buzzwords but real forces driving change. Many associations are already using advanced data analytics to offer more personalised experiences to their members and conference delegates. And while technology is front and centre, there’s also a strong shift towards sustainability, with organisations increasingly prioritizing social responsibility—a trend especially resonating with younger members.

The hybrid event model continues to reshape the way we meet, blending the best of in-person and virtual experiences. It’s a trend that’s here to stay, offering flexibility and wider accessibility. And let’s not forget about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). The importance of fostering inclusive environments remains paramount, and it’s encouraging to see associations take this seriously as they work to reflect the diversity of their communities.

What will the future hold? While we can’t predict everything, we do know this: associations that stay agile and adaptable, embrace collaboration, and invest in continuous learning will be the ones that thrive. These qualities—flexibility, preparedness, and innovation—are what will keep organisations strong, no matter what the future throws at us.

As we move forward, Boardroom will continue to be your guide, exploring these trends and offering the insights needed to navigate this dynamic landscape with confidence. We’ll be launching new products soon, starting with our first-ever association podcast, in partnership with ESAE, early next year. Stay tuned.



Céline Volz

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By Vlcky Koffa

Association Portrait

Addressing Health Inequalities With IUHPE

What does it take to create a world where everyone has equal access to health and well-being? For the Montréal-based International Union for Health Promotion and Education (IUHPE), the answer lies in addressing the root causes of health inequities and empowering communities to thrive. With more than seventy years of dedication, IUHPE is continually adapting its strategies to meet the changing landscape of global health. In this interview, Liane Comeau, Executive Director of IUHPE, shares insights into the organisation's mission, its biggest challenges, and its plans for the future.

What is IUHPE's mission, and how has it evolved to address current global health challenges?

IUHPE's mission has always been to promote health equity by reducing inequalities in access to health and well-being. We focus on the broader determinants of health – ecological, physical, political, and social. Health promotion is about creating environments that support health, instead of concentrating solely on preventing illness. Over the years, this mission has become more pressing as we see growing disparities. The gap between the rich and poor is widening in many areas, making it harder to achieve equity in health. IUHPE continues to address these issues, remaining just as relevant today as we were when we were founded nearly 75 years ago.

What are the main challenges you face as Executive Director in advancing IUHPE's mission today?

One significant challenge is sustaining our membership base. In the digital age, people often perceive information as being freely accessible online, which has made it more difficult for



membership-based organisations like ours to attract and retain members. To counter this, we've had to diversify our revenue streams and demonstrate the unique value we offer, such as exclusive opportunities for engagement, discounts on events, and participation in global health projects. I also think one of the most valuable benefits is less tangible – a community of health promoters from over 100 countries.

Another challenge is the growing polarisation of opinions in society. As a global organisation, I feel we have a duty to focus on what unites health promoters, working across political and cultural divides to address shared health challenges like demographic and climate change, which no single country can tackle alone. After all, health knows no borders.

What kind of events does IUHPE organise, and how are they configured to meet the evolving needs of members?

IUHPE organises both global and regional conferences, typically in collaboration with local partners. These events

are designed to address health promotion priorities while incorporating local priorities and successes of our host regions. For example, our 2019 Global Conference in New Zealand prominently featured Indigenous knowledge and a holistic approach to health that goes beyond human health and well-being.

We've also embraced virtual conferences during the pandemic, which allowed us to include participants who might not have been able to attend in person due to financial or travel constraints. We are now thinking about different approaches, e.g. holding regional events more frequently, in order to offer greater flexibility while maintaining our community feel. I am trying to determine whether this would reduce the overall carbon footprint of our conferences, as sustainability is a growing concern.

What significant trends do you see shaping the health promotion sector, and how is IUHPE responding?

While our core mission of equity in health does not change, the field of health promotion is expanding to address issues that have gained prominence. A major trend is the increasing focus on planetary health, which recognises the deep interconnection between human health and the health of our ecosystems. In response to this, IUHPE has incorporated competencies related to addressing the causes and direct and indirect impacts of our changing natural world into our health promotion frameworks.

We also see an urgent need to address the growing burden of chronic non-communicable diseases worldwide. Our focus is on systemic, policy-driven changes that make it easier for people to live healthy lives – such as improving access to nutritious food, safe environments, and physical activity.

What are your top priorities for IUHPE in the next few years in terms of organisational growth and impact?

Our current strategic plan, which runs through 2026, focuses on three key areas. First, we are prioritising planetary health, addressing the interconnectedness of environmental and human well-being. Second, we aim to reduce the burden of preventable chronic diseases through health promotion policies and systemic interventions. Finally, we want to continue developing health promotion as a field. This includes expanding and promoting our Global Accreditation System and competency frameworks, and ensuring that professionals working in this area have the skills and recognition they need to make a meaningful impact. In doing so, we hope to foster a stronger, more cohesive global community of health promoters, capable of tackling both long-standing and emerging challenges in public health.



Boardroom Dynamics

Why Not Acting as a Team is a Competitive Advantage

Special Boardroom contributor **Dr Ole Petter Anfinssen** explores the boardroom, governance, power and politics.

The role of a board

What is a board? The board of an organisation is the vehicle that provides oversight, guidance and advice but does not get involved in daily operations. In most cases, the board of directors also represents something or someone – e.g., shareholders. While the concept of a board or board of directors is familiar to many, it is often misunderstood. These misconceptions can leave people unprepared, unclear about their roles and responsibilities, or caught in unexpected conflicts.

In this article, I will explore the intricacies of the boardroom and delve into key aspects of boardroom dynamics.

Power & politics

It is important to understand the meaning of power and the different levels of power. Power can come with role and authority but also with knowledge and position. However, having power doesn't necessarily equate to having influence.

In this context, we're talking about politics, where influence is the central

process. It's possible to influence through, for instance, strategies and agendas, demonstrating that one can wield influence even without formal power.

In politics, it's rarely about right or wrong, black or white—it's about the winning argument and navigating the many shades of grey. If asked for advice on politics, I'd sum it up in three words: "Watch your back!" Politics isn't for the faint-hearted or those who take things personally—it's simply business.

This is also why entering the boardroom or engaging in politics is for those who can distance themselves from the subject, remain calm and strategically construct a response – not a reaction.

This environment might sound off-putting to some, but it is the reality. However, it is a fascinating and rewarding realm if one learns to manoeuvre oneself and keep a pragmatic mindset, where one can influence organisations, markets, policies and regulations for instance, while driving organisational culture and performance.

Nevertheless, some individuals might not be on a board for the most obvious reasons. Around the board table, hidden agendas often exist, and for some, the appeal lies not in the organisation itself, but in the power and opportunities that come with having a seat at the table. It's the doors that open through this position that hold the real interest. Some people might be on a specific board because it allows them to influence industry policies, as a result of being invited to sit on other committees – following a board nomination.

Consequently, in the boardroom, both power and political sharpness are of invaluable importance, enabling direction, guidance, control and influence.

Not a team

A board is not a team, and they should not act like one. A board is more like a representative body, directing the organisation. Board members most often represent someone or something, like shareholders or member organisations, with different agendas, focus and strategies.



Therefore, it's more about advocacy, offering the right challenges, maintaining a critical mindset, and asking the right questions. One must avoid what I call the "dodo mentality," where everyone blindly follows the same path, only to realise too late that they've gone over the edge. This is often what happens when the board's role is misunderstood, or people on the board do not understand the role of a board of directors.

Consequently, having a solid governance structure with clear processes following best practices is crucial. It is also important that each member of the board understands

their role and responsibilities and has a clear comprehension of their level of discretion and what is expected of them. Without this, the organisations will, at best, be climbing a tree butt first!

The competitive advantage

Of course, there are different types of boards—corporate, associations, for-profit, and non-profit. However, I would argue the premise remains the same. Whether representing shareholders, investors, organisations, or member demographics, boards must advocate and challenge to drive progress, while ensuring a solid

foundation, managing performance, and driving desired outcomes.

Otherwise, one would lose the edge and competitive advantage. Hence, having a good board with the right constellation of board members, capabilities and knowledge is crucial to success.

Not acting as a team, in this context, is a competitive advantage.

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IBTM World 2024 to Address Global Challenges at Association Leaders Forum

IBTM World has revealed the details of its 2024 Association Leaders Forum, created in partnership with ESAE (European Society of Association Executives) and sponsored by Amsterdam Convention Bureau.

The industry-leading programme will address practical and strategic issues associations face today, focusing on the need to balance executive governance and risk management with innovating and adapting to global challenges to build a thriving association industry of the future.

Taking place on day one, and tying into the theme for IBTM World 2024 – People.Power.Potential, which will provide a platform to explore and understand how people power can be enhanced by harnessing new technologies – the forum will explore how to integrate AI in associations' strategic planning, and how to use the possibilities offered by digital tools to make conferences and events more impactful, engaging and financially sustainable, while continuing the commitment to establish a greener future.

The forum will also try to understand how to prevent burnouts while equipping team members with the right tools and upskilling for them to perform in an efficient and rewarding manner; explore how associations can prepare for a year of significant electoral shifts and provide insights into how association leaders can guide members and staff in navigating the geopolitical environment.

Speakers will include Martin Boyle, CEO, IAPCO; Liesbeth Switten, Secretary General at AIB–Association of Issuing Bodies and ESAE Vice-President; Dianna Steinbach, Senior Vice-President Growth, Institute of Management Accountants; Bobby Peralta, CEO, Philippine Council of Associations & Association Executives; Dennis Speet, Managing Director, Amsterdam Convention Bureau and Cecilia Delgado Molina, Executive Secretary, international Sociological Association.

The day's sessions will be punctuated by networking sessions where attendees can make valuable new connections and meet with existing industry friends.

Claudia Hall, IBTM World Exhibition Director, said: *"We can't wait for attendees to discover the exciting programme we have planned for them at this year's Association Leaders Forum. At IBTM World, we strive above all else to always provide genuine value, and tangible take-homes, for delegates. This year's Forum does just that, supporting association professionals to build an association sector that is not only at the forefront of advancement, but which prospers because of it."*

Designed in partnership with the prestigious ESAE, and curated from the expertise of the organisation's members, the forum has become the annual meeting point for association leaders to exchange ideas, learn, and advance knowledge and best practices in a peer-to-peer setting.

Welcoming approximately 130 association professionals, the interactive sessions will comprise panel discussions, provocative debates, and case studies.

Liesbeth Switten, ESAE Vice-President, said: *"This is the second year in a row we've partnered with IBTM World to design its Association Leaders Forum. As the beating heart of the global events community, it is the ideal location for association professionals to come together to learn, debate, feel inspired, and immerse themselves in the topics which matter most to them. This year's programme doesn't shy away from the big issues, in fact, it welcomes them. Together, we will create an association sector fit for the rest of the 21st century and beyond, and the ideas and voices of our association professionals will be vital in realising this vision."*

To register to IBTM World, visit www.ibtmworld.com

The association today is incredibly complex. It has a myriad of moving parts that generate (useful and non-useful!) friction as well as momentum, is a generator and transformer of intellectual energy.



FEATURE



FEATURE

The Technology Issue

Let's examine the term "technology" from two distinct perspectives: the cutting-edge tools reshaping the association industry, and the time-honored, non-digital systems that continue to drive associations forward. From AI and automation to the strategic transformation of associations, this collection of articles highlights how both new innovations and established frameworks are enabling organisations to succeed in a changing environment.

By Connie Lau

What Makes a Successful Digital Transformation?

A Strategic Guide for Association Executives

How many times did you touch your phone today? On average, smartphone users touch, tap, or swipe their phone 2,617 times a day. Whether you're responding to an email, checking your project management app, or asking AI to help write that message you just can't seem to get right, digitalisation is already a reality in our day-to-day work. Embracing digital transformation is no longer a luxury but rather a necessity for associations aiming to stay relevant and efficient.

By leveraging technology, organisations can streamline operations, cut costs, and enhance the skills of their staff. This article provides an overview and practical guide to how associations can incorporate technology into their strategic planning and daily operations, drawing on the experiences and successes of the World Association of Chefs' Societies (Worldchefs)

Why Technology and Digital Transformation?

Digital technologies are already reshaping every industry. Embracing technology is essential for staying competitive in a digitalised world, and meeting the evolving needs of stakeholders.

A thoughtful and strategic digital transformation enables associations to operate more efficiently, reduce costs, and improve member engagement. It allows for better data management, enhanced communication, and the ability to offer new services and benefits to members.

What Needs to Be Done?

Transformation is a continuous process, and like any change, requires careful consideration and a well laid out plan for implementation.

Taking a structured approach to integrating digital tools and technologies into your association will help to ensure its success. Additionally, plans must be agile, allowing your

organisation to adapt quickly to new developments and feedback to stay ahead in a rapidly evolving landscape.

Step 1: Analyze Current Problems and Issues

The first step in any digital transformation journey is to identify the current challenges and inefficiencies within your organisation. This involves conducting a thorough analysis of existing processes and pinpointing areas that can be improved through technology.

Step 2: Identify Problems Solvable by Technology

Once key issues are identified, the next step is to determine which problems can be addressed with technological solutions. This could range from automating repetitive tasks to implementing advanced data analytics for better decision-making. Understanding which tools can help you meet your goals allows you to better incorporate technology into your overall growth strategy.

Step 3: Identify the Target Audience

Understanding who will benefit from the new technology is key. This includes members, clients, and other stakeholders. Tailoring the technology to meet the needs of these groups will ensure higher adoption rates and greater overall success, and staying focused on your audience's needs allows for a more agile response. Consider how you can engage with your members in this process to gather valuable feedback and increase the likelihood of successful adoption.

Step 4: Find Suitable Tools and Technology

Selecting the right tools and technologies is crucial for a successful digital transformation. Associations should consider solutions that align with strategic goals and enhance existing operational models. More importantly, choose technologies that are scalable and flexible to accommodate future growth and changes. This ensures that your investment remains valuable over time.

Step 5: Develop an Implementation Plan

Create a structured plan outlining the digital tools needed, key phases, timelines, and assigned responsibilities. This plan is crucial to ensure a smooth transition, minimise disruptions, and keep the project on track. Prioritising projects based on impact and feasibility to achieve quick wins and demonstrate value to stakeholders. Allocate resources and set milestones for better progress tracking. Even a small step towards integrating technology and AI is better than doing nothing, as it can significantly enhance your association's capabilities.

Step 6: Train and Support Your Staff

Investing in staff training is essential to ensure that your team can effectively use new technologies. Preparing, training, and supporting your staff with a change management strategy ensures they are learning while you are transitioning to new tools, systems, and technologies. This is one of the most important actions to make your digital transformation successful. Providing ongoing education and training programs to your staff helps them stay up-to-date with the latest tools and best practices, and better communicate the benefits to your members.

Step 7: Set Future Vision and Goals, and Stay Close to Technology

Establishing a clear vision and set of goals is vital for guiding the digital transformation process. Associations should continuously monitor technological advancements and be ready to adapt strategies to leverage new opportunities.

By following these steps, you empower your association to deliver enhanced value to your members, improve internal efficiencies, and make a greater impact.

For more information on digital transformation tools, reach out to Connie Lau, Director of Operations and Projects, Worldchefs, here: www.linkedin.com/in/connielau

For more information on Worldchefs, visit www.worldchefs.org.

This article is part of the exclusive partnership between ESAE and Boardroom. For more information about ESAE, visit www.esae.eu.



WORLDCHEFS' DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION JOURNEY

The digital transformation journey of Worldchefs provides a case study of how associations can apply this framework to lead digital transformation successfully.

Worldchefs is an award-winning international professional organisation, with the largest membership of culinary associations around the globe. With a diverse mandate and members in over 110 countries, Worldchefs embarked on our digitalisation journey to streamline operations, enhance member engagement, and innovate new ways to deliver on their mission.

Setting out to future-proof their association, Worldchefs' journey involved shifting from paper-based processes to digital platforms, implementing cloud solutions, and adopting various technologies to streamline workflows and improve communication. Worldchefs effectively leveraged podcasts, webinars, online election tools, graphic design software and AI to better engage with stakeholders globally.

By empowering staff and members alike to work in new ways, giving day-to-day tools a digital upgrade, and constantly reflecting and improving their tools, both traditional and digital, Worldchefs has been able to leverage digital technologies to stay ahead of the curve.

When COVID-19 hit in 2020, Worldchefs was able to swiftly adapt to the "new normal" by leaning in on digital platforms.

The Sustainability Around the World webcast channel, launched as part of these efforts, became an important mainstay in their programming, reaching tens of thousands of viewers with over 30 episodes focused on sustainable food practices. This move to digital was expanded through online webinars, e-learning courses, and virtual events, which allowed Worldchefs to engage with millions of chefs and stakeholders worldwide, during the pandemic and beyond. The organisation hosts over 30 webinars annually, has enrolled more than 60,000 students in courses on its open source learning platform Worldchefs Academy, and produced over 100 podcast episodes, significantly broadening its global reach and community engagement.

This example provides key insights into how associations can embed digital tools into their daily operations for increased efficiency and member engagement:

- **Use Task and Project Management Tools:** Implementing robust task and project management tools, like Kantree and Airtable, can streamline processes and improve collaboration. These tools help in setting up efficient process flows and removing manual, repetitive tasks through automation.
- **Automation:** Automating routine tasks not only saves time but also reduces the risk of human error. This can include everything from automated email responses to complex data processing tasks.

Worldchefs uses Kantree to setup simple online forms and automate email reply processes in daily routine tasks.

- **Use Data Analysis for Growth:** Leveraging data analytics can provide valuable insights into member behavior, event success, and overall organisational performance. This data-driven approach helps in making informed decisions and identifying growth opportunities. Using tools like Google Analytics and SEO tools like SMERush and Yoast allows you to make data-driven decisions.
- **Digitising Paperwork:** Avoiding paperwork and making processes digital can significantly enhance efficiency. Tools like DocuSign for electronic signatures and cloud storage solutions like Egnyte and Google Drive can help in this transition.
- **Use Conference Technology:** Virtual and hybrid conference technologies have become essential, especially post-pandemic. These platforms enable associations to reach a wider audience, reduce costs associated with physical events, and provide interactive and engaging experiences for members. Explore tools: Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Hopin are popular choices for hosting virtual and hybrid events, and ElectionBuddy is a smart solution for online elections.
- **Social Media:** Utilising social media platforms effectively can enhance member engagement and expand your

association's reach. Regular updates, interactive content, and community-building activities on social media can foster a sense of belonging among members. Tools including Sprout Social for social media management, Canva AI for content creation, and Invideo for AI video creation.

- **E-Learning, Webinars and Podcasts:** Offering online courses and webinars can help in upskilling and reskilling staff and members. These platforms provide flexible learning opportunities and can be tailored to meet the specific needs of the association. If you don't plan to build your own platform, platforms like Coursera and Udemy offer a wide range of courses that can be customised for your members. Additionally, podcasts can help you capture your audience's attention without requiring them to stay on screen, allowing them to listen and learn at their convenience. Tools like LibSyn and Descript can facilitate this process. For AI interpretation and translation, tools like Interprefy and Maestra can be highly effective.

For associations aiming to future-proof their operations, our Worldchefs' experience highlights that investing in digital tools and strategies is not just an option—it's a necessity for sustained success in today's dynamic landscape. With a thoughtful strategy incorporating the steps of this guide, you can be a digital-savvy leader in your association. Don't wait to change—act now to ensure your association remains competitive and relevant.

The Association & Other Non-technical Technologies

Global Association Hubs' International Advisor Martin Sirk reminds associations to fully embrace and exploit well-proven and aeons-old technologies, and not be entirely seduced by shiny, fashionable newcomers.

What actually is technology? The answer is remarkably simple but at the same time incredibly mind-bending: it's any systematic, replicable means by which humans solve problems or improve efficiency.

Unfortunately (for the purpose of my argument here, and indeed, generally!), when we use the word "technology" today, the vast majority of people assume we're only talking about computers (hardware and software), cutting-edge machinery or infrastructure, or biological and chemical manipulations. In other words, futuristic, shiny, sci-fi-adjacent stuff, and especially anything with "AI" attached. If it's not new it's generally ignored. If it's not "techie" it's generally discounted.

The "Lindy Effect" & long-term technology

The Lindy Effect essentially states that the longer a non-perishable item (physical or conceptual) has been around, the longer it's likely to persist into the future. Recognisable variations of coffee shops will be more likely to be commonplace in 2075 than cup-cake or macaron outlets are to even exist; pens and books will be dramatically more likely to survive into the next century than Facebook and Twitter/X (thank goodness!) or even laptop computers. Christianity, Islam and Buddhism will outlast Goop (sorry, Gwyneth!), Nike and General Motors.

Some of today's most important technologies can be traced back to the Renaissance, the Agricultural Revolution, or even the Stone Age. But they are so integrated into our habitual lives that we don't think of them as "tech". Cooking with fire is an obvious example, but language, social norms and cultural practices, negotiation and conflict resolution are also numbered amongst the most ancient technologies. Money and trade

systems, mathematics and logic, legal, bureaucratic and governance models came later, but still centuries or millennia ago.

Other hugely influential technologies include religions and philosophical systems, economic and education systems, and even timekeeping (which is foundational for everything from ancient agricultural organisation to GPS accuracy on our iPhones).

The Association as Technology

Perhaps one of the greatest technological inventions of all time is the association itself! And like many of the ancient techs mentioned above, it emerged bottom-up rather than top-down, honed into today's easily-identified conceptual models via decades of trial and error, as individuals recognised their common interests and purpose, and systemised repeatable processes for achieving these goals. The first founders of associations didn't imagine they were creating a technology, their focus was on a purpose that could only be advanced collectively, but that is indeed what they created!

The association today is incredibly complex. It has a myriad of moving parts that generate (useful and non-useful!) friction as well as momentum, is a generator and transformer of intellectual energy; it is a filtration system and multi-layered research lab, and most importantly, can convert all this complexity into common purpose and societal advancement.

The association-as-technology gives us a powerful model for maximising impact and measuring success, for understanding efficiency (and why redundancy is so critical!), and for working out how other technologies (including shiny, new AI and its friends) can be successfully integrated.

Practical advice: nuts & bolts

Every new technology you purchase and plug in will influence and change most or even all of your association-machine's operating system processes. Think about impacts on culture and power-relationships, about unintended consequences in far-distant parts of your organisation, and potential overloading on key joints and pressure points.

Communication is critical: it is the circulation system that keeps association systems lubricated. Board, CEO and management team, frontline operators, back-office administrators: comms failures between or within any of these are the primary causes of new technology adoption catastrophes!

Redundancy is another commonly-overlooked new-tech adoption point-of-failure. It isn't enough that your latest technology improves overall efficiency, it should take care not to eliminate essential redundancy. We saw the macro-version of the dangers of over-efficiency and lack of redundancy when global supply chains creaked and cracked wide-open during the pandemic. Always invest in back-up systems and think through alternative solutions and a wide range of scenarios, before eliminating all but a single solution.

Maybe your AI-implementation enables you to release a couple of long-serving staff from the marketing department: is it possible that most of that department's mission-critical institutional knowledge walks out the door with them, leaving you to set up the AI with avoidable in-built weaknesses? Don't undervalue or ignore the tacit knowledge within your teams.

The list-price of new technology is always only the starting point. It never addresses the cost of changes that need to be made throughout the association in order to fully integrate, implement and deeply understand the implications of the changes. Much of that cost is the opportunity-cost of diverting management and operational time away from other functions. The value of time is almost never accurately calculated in associations' budgetary thinking.

Finally, remember that your association machine, as well as being immensely powerful is also fragile: it needs careful, mindful nurturing. And, as with AI, much of what goes on inside the association's "black box" is essentially unknowable. We can view the outcomes, but the algorithm that determines the relationships, interactions and information exchanges between thousands of members contains many mysteries. Respect the long-standing culture and traditions within your association: these non-techie technologies may be doing a lot more work than you imagine!

This article is written under a partnership between Boardroom and Global Association Hubs – Brussels, Dubai, Singapore and Washington DC – which are committed to building innovative partnerships with international associations, and to creating opportunities for the discussion of key strategic association issues such as this.

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By Erin Fuller

Using AI to Drive More Meaningful Member Engagement

Activating your association's community through AI enhances the member journey by using data to personalise interactions, build stronger connections and guide members from passive participants to active contributors.

As associations increasingly seek ways to deepen member engagement and drive long-term loyalty, artificial intelligence (AI) is emerging as a powerful tool to streamline and personalise the member journey. Not only does AI have the potential to automate and simplify key stages of membership operations — from onboarding to renewals to communication management — but it can also enhance the member experience and engagement with your association.

The MCI 2024 Association Engagement Index (AEI), a global benchmark that measures the effectiveness of associations' engagement strategies, underscores the importance of understanding and guiding members through what it describes as the Engagement Loop. This loop represents a continuous cycle of interaction — moving from passive to highly active engagement — comprised of four stages:

1. Consume: Members are engaging passively, accessing content such as newsletters, blogs or publications, webinars, etc. This aspect of the cycle represents a low-effort yet foundational step in engagement, largely defined by solo activities.

2. Contribute: Members are participating in networking programs or activities like live or virtual events, commenting on online forums, etc. This is a first step in becoming more invested in the peer-to-peer aspect of the association.

3. Collaborate: Members are collaborating and sharing professional expertise within the community by joining task forces or committees.

4. Co-create: Members are influencing the direction of the association and helping advance its mission and goals in a volunteer leadership position or through product development, strategic planning, etc.

By strategically using AI, associations can engage their members, no matter where they are in their journey, by providing personalised opportunities to get involved. Here are four considerations for how you can use AI to create moments that move your members from passive participants to active contributors and advocates, based on the AEI Engagement Loop.

1. Consume: Provide tailored content

AI can enhance the consumption stage by analysing member preferences and delivering personalised content recommendations. For instance, AI-driven algorithms can suggest relevant articles or upcoming events based on a member's past interactions. This tailored approach makes it easier for members to find value early on, encouraging them to continue engaging.

As associations offer a variety of online and offline engagement opportunities, AI can also track how members interact across channels and adapt content accordingly. The AEI emphasises the importance of an omnichannel strategy that gives members a choice on what content they consume, through their preferred channel. While this doesn't mean your association should have a presence on every platform that exists, understanding where your members are and aligning your goals to those channels is the way to go.

2. Contribute: Encourage participation with targeted opportunities

The transition from consuming to contributing marks a shift toward active engagement, as members are participating in events, forums or surveys. AI can facilitate this shift by identifying members who are ready to contribute and offering them specific opportunities that match their interests.

For example, predictive analytics (an approach that uses data to forecast events or behaviors) can determine which members are likely to engage based on their consumption patterns. Associations can then send targeted invitations for activities like participating in virtual events, creating content or taking on open volunteer roles. Personalised prompts can highlight how these contributions will benefit the members both personally and professionally, making it easier for them to take the next step.

3. Collaborate: Build deeper connections through AI-enhanced networking

Here, members engage more deeply by sharing their expertise and working alongside peers in task forces, committees or special interest groups. AI tools can help foster these connections by matching members with similar interests or complementary skills, enhancing the collaboration experience.

By analysing data on member profiles and engagement history, AI can recommend collaboration opportunities and connect members with like-minded people. This cultivates a sense of community and belonging, which is crucial for long-term engagement. AI-driven collaboration platforms can also facilitate real-time discussions and project management (taking notes and documenting key action items during a meeting, for instance), making it easier for members to collaborate effectively, whether they are participating in person or virtually.

impact by identifying members who are highly engaged and ready to take on leadership roles or participate in strategic planning.

Through sentiment analysis and engagement tracking, AI can pinpoint members who demonstrate a high level of commitment and are likely to contribute at a deeper level. Sentiment analysis can gauge member satisfaction, track feelings about events or services, and find improvement areas by analysing member surveys or social media comments for positive, negative or neutral sentiment. Engagement tracking involves monitoring how members interact with an association's offerings — such as event attendance, content consumption and social media activity — using tools like your association's AMS and analytics platforms.

Insights from this data allow associations to directly encourage these members to get involved in innovation projects, product development or governance. AI can also streamline co-creation by facilitating brainstorming sessions and collecting feedback through digital platforms, ensuring that all members can participate, regardless of their location.

By leveraging AI throughout the member journey, associations can provide a customised, data-driven experience that encourages deeper, more meaningful engagement. AI's ability to personalise content, suggest targeted opportunities and facilitate collaboration helps associations guide members from passive consumption to active co-creation, strengthening their relationship while driving loyalty, advocacy and long-term success.

Erin Fuller, CAE, FASAE, is the chief strategy officer at MCI USA. This article is part of an exclusive partnership between IAPCO and Boardroom.

IAPCO is a not-for-profit membership association, registered in Switzerland. IAPCO members are Professional Congress Organisers (companies, not individuals) who have qualified for membership under the detailed application process by demonstrating that they consistently deliver PCO services to their clients and partners at high-quality standards.



4. Co-create: Empower members to shape the association's future

This stage signifies peak member engagement, where members actively contribute to shaping the association's mission, strategy or programs. AI can have a transformative

By Hannah Carvalho

Three Ways IT Teams & Staff Technology Champions Can Collaborate

Association technology teams are seeing a boost in the number of non-tech staffers finding solutions to their IT problems. Knowing that, organizations must create a culture and process where all staff have a way to bring their ideas to the table.

With the acceleration of technology literacy among staff since the pandemic, it's not surprising that IT departments have also seen an increase in the number of technology champions throughout the organization.

"In the past, everyone turned to IT to ask for solutions, but now people are finding their own solutions," said David Stephenson, senior vice president of technology at Entrepreneurs' Organization (EO). *"IT needs to figure out how to govern it, how to make sure its secure, how to make sure we don't have redundant systems across the organization."*

In this environment, IT departments need to create a space where staff feel comfortable approaching IT with new ideas and tools.

"You want to maintain relationships with staff across all departments," said Josh Bula, web development and director of information technology at the Florida Music Education Association (FMEA).

Here are three steps organizations can take to foster a collaborative environment where staff have a role in forwarding innovation and technology.

Understand Staff Needs

Staff often have different needs when it comes to tech tools and interfaces based on their departments, their work with members, and their location.

"As a global organization, I've had tech champions from Japan and the Philippines bringing new tools to my attention I'd never



heard of before,” Stephenson said. “We also had to figure out how to support global applications like WhatsApp because that’s what members in certain parts of the world use.”

Employing application specialists in your organization can better help IT departments stay up to date about the needs of different departments. The application specialists are assigned to different business owners and products so they can support those specific areas and bring back information to the IT department.

“It’s essentially embedding people into different departments,” Stephenson said. “We have technology product owners who work with each business unit and figure out how to implement new systems that they’re interested and help them connect the dots, so you want a structure in place.”

Embrace Flexibility

In addition to recognizing the needs of different departments, IT teams should be open to ideas that staff technology champions bring to them.

For example, when staff approach Bula with a new solution, he talks with them about how that technology fits into the bigger picture for the organization and plans out the best course of action, even if that differs from the original request.

“When IT is open to new technologies, the team can ask the right questions about problems staff are trying to solve and have the data to have real discussions about what is or isn’t doable and other tech options that might be more compatible with the existing infrastructure,” Bula said.

Fostering a collaborative environment will also help IT identify technology champions and take advantage of their passion for technology.

“Inviting tech champions to serve on committees will give them a sense that their talents are making a strong contribution to the organization and its mission,” Bula said.

Prioritize Cybersecurity

While technology champions typically have the best intentions in mind when finding and then using new technology tools, they may not factor in data security and safety.

“For example, if staff need to collaborate with members, and IT says it’s not going to open external sharing on OneDrive, they’re going to find another way and IT may not be in a position to shut it down if it’s in support of members,” Stephenson said.

In those cases, Stephenson recommends building structure around the solution. For example, if IT discovers that their association has 10 different Dropbox accounts, the team can roll the data under one corporate account and place an admin on it to give them some insight and control.

IT departments should also ensure staff have regular cybersecurity training. Bula gives staff data and real-world examples of how organizations can get hacked and the dangers that arise from not following security policies.

“You want to explain to staff why we have these best practices and security policies,” he said. “The more knowledgeable they are, the more they’ll understand why they may not be able to pursue something.”

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By Steve MacKenzie & Sven Bossu

Finding the Problem to Fix

Organisations worldwide, including convention centres, are facing a dilemma: which technology should they invest in? For us, the starting point is not the technology, but the problem to fix. Taking this approach will ensure company-wide acceptance of the change which comes with the new technology and allow for a focus on value creation and ROI.

Our industry has traditionally been a slower adopter of technology than other industries: we often wait until they become more mainstream in people's lives before we readily accept them. However, we do leave ourselves open for disruption if our first tendency is to shy away rather than embrace technology. There are more options than ever before vying for the event attendee's dollar, and we do not want to be left behind.

Each year around Christmas time, lists are published with the top 10 technologies to look out for the next year. Unsurprisingly, AI was at the top of many of those lists for 2024. We had a look at what AI could bring to a convention centre and it proved to be a lot: from predictive maintenance, customer experience design, Natural Language Queries (NLQ) for easier reporting, revenue management and much more (we ended up with a list of 9 focus areas). And AI is just one of the many technologies in the top 10 charts mentioned.

At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that any investment in technology will come with change, impacting one or several teams within the organisation. Recent research by Gartner (Top 5 HR Trends and Priorities For 2024 | Gartner) indicates

that change management is one of the top 5 HR challenges faced worldwide.

In a nutshell, it comes down to the fact that there is "change fatigue" in many organisations. To address this, management needs to invest a lot of time in explaining the drivers for change, how they fit with the overall strategy and market landscape and how it will impact the individual employer. Most technology projects that fail are because there wasn't enough emphasis placed on the change process. People can feel threatened or overwhelmed. The best way to ensure this isn't the case is to ensure everyone who is going to be impacted by the introduction of a new technology project is included in the planning and implementation.



Value driven

Combining these two facts – the multitude of possible technology investment and the change management required – makes it even more important that investments are value driven, ideally from different perspectives.

The following example makes this clearer. Food waste is a big challenge in the event industry, as it can have a big impact on the ecological footprint of an event. But it also has a significant financial impact, and it is not compliant with the values of the upcoming generations – both on the client and the service provider's side. Therefore, investing in technology which reduces food waste is likely to be easily accepted, even though the implementation will have an impact on the current way of working, simply because it ticks a lot of boxes: values, ROI, sustainability and possibly a commercial advantage.

Sometimes, the decisions to take are less straightforward. How much should we invest in cybersecurity? Should we upgrade the existing system or invest in a new one? Should we insource or outsource? Unfortunately, there are no easy answers to these questions. However, we believe that applying a clear process will make things a lot easier.

First of all, it is important to have an overview of the areas within your company where you believe technology could make a difference. This could be part of the SWOT or SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results) analysis that most organisations do on a regular basis. Once the areas are defined, a prioritisation needs to be made. This could be done by offsetting impact versus effort. It is very important that the full management team is aligned on this analysis before moving to the next step, as this will be the very foundation of any investment. Once the priorities are clear, you need to look for use cases that build value through improved productivity, growth and new business models. It is very likely you will need to look outside your own industry to find good cases. In the world of convention centres, temperature tracking in engines, as applied in many manufacturing environments, could be of interest for monitoring the performance of critical infrastructure. Booking systems as applied by airlines – including a dynamic pricing system – could be of use to automate booking of meeting rooms.

No right/wrong answers

Once the examples are found, you will need to decide on the approach. Will you implement the new technology on a stand-alone basis? Do you want

it to be integrated with your existing systems? Or are you going for a full re-build? (in AI, these options are defined as “taker”, “shaper” or “maker”). Once again, there are no right/wrong answers to this, but it is important to be aware of and agree on the consequences of the choice made.

Next will be to create a multi-functional team who will analyze the solution in detail. Typically, this team will involve representatives of all the departments impacted. In the case of the automated room booking system, this will be sales, IT, operations and finance. Having such a team will ensure that all different aspects (from customer experience to invoicing) are considered.

Finally, an assessment needs to be made of the upskilling/reskilling required within the organisation, the risks involved and the mitigation actions which can be taken.

Going through this five-step process will allow any organisation to take technology related decisions in a way which will both ensure value creation and smoother change management, eventually leading to higher performance at company level.

Steve MacKenzie is Chief Innovation Officer at Momentus Technologies; Sven Bossu, CEO of AIPC, which represents a global network of over 200 leading centres in 55 countries with the active involvement of more than 1000 management-level professionals worldwide. www.aipc.org



By Senthil Gopinath

Tomorrow Starts Today

ICCA on How Technology Ignites Change & Propels us Toward the Future

As the international meetings and events space continues to move forward, we are inevitably faced with the challenge of how to best take advantage of the progress science and technology has undergone, especially over the last decade. Our industry is one based on a few basic principles: at its core, it's about bringing people together to exchange ideas, share knowledge with one another, and collaborate on the development of just about everything under the sun.

As the international meetings and events space continues to move forward, we are inevitably faced with the challenge of how to best take advantage of the progress science and technology has undergone, especially over the last decade. Our industry is one based on a few basic principles: at its core, it's about bringing people together to exchange ideas, share knowledge with one another, and collaborate on the development of just about everything under the sun.

The practice of human connection, knowledge exchange, and learning from each other is as old as time itself, and the business of facilitating these interactions has been around since human beings first began trading and interacting with each other. It's fair to say meetings and events have been around since the dawn of history – and we're so proud to be able to carry the torch forward in this space.

The ICCA Congress: At the Forefront of the Latest Tech Trends

Staying abreast of the most up-to-date technology is crucial in a competitive, fast-moving industry. ICCA puts the focus on these vanguard technologies at the 63rd ICCA Congress in Abu Dhabi, where attendees experienced groundbreaking session on the most relevant technologies affecting the meetings and events space today, including Artificial Intelligence, which is poised to change the way events professionals operate.

This year's Congress was designed to allow participants to tailor their experience to fit their own individual needs, using the world's first AI-based real-time content summarisation tool: SnapSight by Gevme. This groundbreaking technology allowed ICCA to gather insights and feedback from attendees at the Sharing Hubs during the 62nd ICCA Congress in Bangkok in real time, providing key insights into preferences, learning styles, and opinions.

Using these takeaways, programme designers developed content that homes in on the needs and expectations of events professionals, providing the information, data, and material most relevant to their roles and organisations.

Insight into Attendee Behaviour & Preferences Guides Design

In Abu Dhabi, The Hub continued the legacy of the Sharing Hubs in Bangkok with a dynamic programme featuring the content developed with insights provided by AI integrated tools. The ICCA Team listened to delegates and created this interactive, user-centred space designed to enhance participant experience and facilitate the free exchange of information and ideas. Participants self-select specific Personas that align with their personalities and preferences, and this choice has guided them through a custom-made Congress that allowed them to join in the sessions that were most valuable to them.



This exciting new conference style was made possible by the power of AI, which is poised to revolutionise the meetings industry with its ability to provide insight into the way participants interact with content and with the conference environment.

Dynamic presentations at the Congress showcased the tangible impact of AI, particularly Generative AI, on all facets of our industry, from event planning to destination marketing and beyond. ICCA AI sessions highlighted the progress of AI applications across the business events, including the accelerating pace of change and the growing necessity for industry professionals to adapt and upskill in this AI-driven era.

Accessibility is of major importance to the next generation of event professionals and to the future of business events. To that end, participants at this year's Congress had access to real-time AI powered translations by Wordly, which provided live visual and audio translations of sessions so all attendees could enjoy a comprehensive experience throughout the event.

In an innovative session focusing on another cutting-edge technology, Thomas Mauch of RAI Amsterdam led attendees into a discussion of a future where Augmented Reality (AR) redefines association events, transforming them into immersive, personalized experiences. AR has transcended novelty to become crucial for innovative event planning and management.

This isn't a distant future; these innovations are less than a decade away, promising a new era of engagement and interaction. This Congress session invited event planners, marketers, and technologists to reimagine association events as immersive journeys. AR can connect us more deeply with knowledge, people, and ideas, setting the stage for

innovative, personalized, and impactful association events, and the ICCA Congress was the premier destination to showcase this exciting new horizon in technology.

Streamlined Event Management and Production, with a High-Tech Flair

In addition to developments in AI, the meetings landscape is being continually changed by ongoing developments in management and production software and hybrid event platforms, which came into favour during the pandemic and transformed the way people interact and meet all around the world.

Programmes like Zoom, Hopin, and ON24 allow for remote participation, and advanced event management software like EventsAir serves as a one-stop-shop for meeting organisers, providing event registration, scheduling, and post-event analytics and feedback.

The world of meetings needs to move quickly to stay in step with the latest developments in technology, and ICCA is committed to utilising all the tools at our disposal to facilitate events that inspire, educate and spark connection. This year's Congress showcased the best of business events, bringing our community together for an unforgettable experience in a spectacular place.

This article written by ICCA CEO Senthil Gopinath is a result of the special collaboration established between Boardroom and ICCA, formalised through their official media partnership. Associations interested in joining ICCA can have a look at www.iccaworld.org/join/association-community



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In the last twenty
years, from
2004 to 2023,
the number of
associations with
headquarters
in Brussels has
grown by 28%

DESTINATIONS

By Guy Hall

Infrastructure Initiatives & Intellectual Innovation Enhance Dubai's Offering

Long gone are the days when Dubai, the largest city of the United Arab Emirates, and its capital, was considered solely a destination for leisure travel. While the city still sees millions of tourists visiting each year, over the past decade associations have increasingly turned to Dubai as a setting for their meetings and events, due to its world-class venues, accessible location and the hospitality of its people.



Thanks to recent support from the city's leaders, Dubai continues to strengthen its offering with significant improvements to its meetings infrastructure and developments of its diverse knowledge base. With these strategic enhancements, the city seeks to cement its position as a leading events destination, and as a hub for international collaboration and knowledge exchange.

Expansion of the Dubai Exhibition Centre

On September 23, HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum – the Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE, and Ruler of Dubai – approved an €2,6 expansion plan for the Dubai Exhibition Centre (DEC) at EXPO City Dubai.

The expansion will enable Dubai to double the number of large-scale events hosted annually and, once the work is



complete, DEC will be the largest purpose-built indoor event venue in the Middle East. These developments come as part of the Dubai 2040 Urban Master Plan which aims to enhance the city's livability, sustainability and economic diversity through urban development initiatives.

The DEC's expansion is not the only one of its kind. It was also recently announced that Al Maktoum International Airport would undergo a transformation, with the construction of a new €33 billion passenger terminal. Through these projects Dubai seeks to leverage its strategic location as a crossroads for international trade, and solidify its position as a preferred global hub for international exhibitions and conferences.

The master plan for the expansion of the DEC outlines three key phases to accommodate an increasing demand for large-scale venues in the city.

Currently, the DEC has a capacity of 58,000 square metres of exhibition space. Phase 1, slated for completion by 2026, will more than double this – taking the total to 140,000 square metres. Once Phase 2 is complete, which should be by 2028, this will have increased to nearly 160,000 square metres. And by the time Phase 3 – and the expansion as a whole – has finished in 2031, the DEC will house 180,000 square metres of indoor exhibition space.

This vast space will feature 26 halls, positioned on a single continuous level spanning roughly 1.2km, and will be available either for a single “mega event” or 20 simultaneous smaller events. For associations, this versatility allows for the creation of more dynamic, tailored spaces to suit their needs and the size of their events.

When announcing the expansion, HH Sheikh Mohammed said: “This iconic venue will not only become the largest indoor exhibition and events destination in the region but also set new

global standards for excellence in the industry. Our events provide platforms for connecting people, ideas, and opportunities from across the globe. They provide the impetus for economic growth, boost tourism, and contribute significantly to advancing our national projects, strengthening Dubai's growing role as a global economic hub.”

This quotation shows the value that Dubai's leadership are placing on events and their role in driving the city's, and the UAE's, continued economic and social successes.

The Importance of Business Events

Every year, Cvent, the meetings event and hospitality technology provider, releases a list of Top Meeting Destinations, showcasing in-demand meeting destinations around the globe. For the last three years, Dubai has topped the list specific to the Middle East and Africa. This is no accident.

Having garnered a reputation as a premier destination for leisure tourism, Dubai's leaders – including Sheikh Mohammed – have set their sights on furthering the city's reputation as a go-to destination for business events.

This should come as no surprise. Studies have shown the global business events industry to be a powerhouse of economic development – contributing \$1.6 trillion to the global GDP annually and supporting millions of jobs. Dubai is strategically well placed to access an impactful share of this thriving industry. Located just an eight-hour flight from two-thirds of the world's population, the city is highly accessible and provides a gateway to emerging markets in a variety of regions, including Oman, Nigeria and Indonesia. This, combined with the city's multicultural and hospitable population as well as world-class infrastructure, makes Dubai a compelling option for organisations looking to convene members from around the globe.



Associations are increasingly realising how much the city has to offer as an event destination. For 2023, for example, the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) named the city as the number one destination in the Middle East by number of association meetings hosted. Prestigious events taking place this year include Critical Communications World CCW 2024, WCA Annual Conference 2024 and the Million Dollar Round Table Global Conference 2024.

The official conference bureau of Dubai, Dubai Business Events (DBE), has been instrumental in attracting such events – in part thanks to their successful Al Safer Congress Ambassador Programme. The initiative identifies and supports UAE-based thought leaders and government representatives in attracting association events within their sector to Dubai.

These events are helping to fuel Dubai's rapidly growing knowledge sector and economic ambitions. In addition to helping cement Dubai's image as one of the world's most business-friendly destinations, events are having a tangible impact on job creation. In 2023, events hosted at the Dubai World Trade Centre alone supported almost 70,000 jobs in Dubai, with a collective disposable household income of nearly €910 million.

Planting Seeds of Innovation

Dubai's intellectual offerings play a central role in attracting events, and their knowledge capital is ever-growing. Amid efforts to diversify their economy beyond oil, in 2024 the UAE made a significant leap in Kearney's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Confidence Index, moving from 18th place to 8th. In Dubai, sectors such as healthcare and pharmaceuticals, energy and

cleantech, as well as technology and ICT continue to grow at rapid rates – fuelled by support from the city's government.

On September 15th, HH Sheikh Hamadan bin Mohammed bin Rasihid Al Maktoum, the Crown Prince of Dubai and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Dubai Future Foundation, approved the launch of the “Dubai Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) Grant Initiative”. This programme seeks to provide funding for a range of research projects, driving progress in some of the city's key economic sectors.

The Dubai RDI Grant will support 20 research projects in the Life Sciences and Cognitive Cities arenas. Cognitive Cities refers to urban environments that leverage advanced technology, AI and Big Data to improve the management of these spaces and the quality of life for their residents.

Examples of initiatives in this space funded by the Dubai RDI grant include work in Smart Mobility, PropTech and Traffic Management.

Upon the announcement of the initiative, HH Sheikh Hamdan said: *“With the launch of this initiative, we aim to make Dubai amongst the most future-ready cities in the world, and the most prepared to harness scientific research to achieve impactful accomplishments.”*

“Dubai will become a destination of choice for regional and international scientists and researchers. To achieve this goal, we must strengthen collaboration and partnerships between the public and private sectors, as well as universities and research institutions.”





As the relationship between these various bodies strengthens, the innovation ecosystem in Dubai will continue to develop – adding to the value that the city can provide for associations that host events there.

Looking to the Future

With all these developments, in both intellectual capital and infrastructure, Dubai clearly has a long-term vision for their place in the meetings industry. With this comes their concern for the future of the planet, and the city is taking steps to ensure that sustainability remains central to their planning.

Initiatives like Dubai Can – the phasing out of single-use plastic water bottles – and the Dubai Sustainable Tourism Stamp, which recognises the efforts of hotels to improve their sustainability practices, demonstrate a consideration for the issue on a city-level. And these same values permeate the MICE industry, with Expo City Dubai being designed as a blueprint for sustainable developments.

Through incorporating green initiatives like this, and with the huge investments into the city's venues and innovation ecosystem, Dubai will continue to cement itself as a leading hub for business events and a top choice for associations looking to host memorable and impactful gatherings.

Hold your next event in Dubai and visit
www.dubaibusinesssevents.com

A NEW UNIVERSITY IN DUBAI

On September 9 this year, HH Sheikh Mohammed announced the establishment of Dubai National University, with an investment of €1.17 billion. Part of Dubai Social Agenda 33 – which strives to improve the social well-being of the Emirati people – the university's foundation aims to create a new generation of Emirati professionals and leaders, while enhancing Dubai's position as a global hub for scientific research.

Dubai National University will offer specialised programmes and has set itself a target of ranking among the top 50 young universities in the next decade, and in the top 200 global universities within the next 20 years. On the foundation of the university, HH Sheikh Mohammed had this to say: *"We are not just building a university; we are building a future that transcends borders. Our goal is to establish a knowledge centre that will be a beacon for science, a hub for youth, and a resource for the future."*

HH Sheikh Hamdan added to this, saying, *"Dubai National University will develop local talent, attract global expertise, and foster academic collaboration with institutions, research centres, and experts worldwide, embodying Dubai's dynamic innovation ecosystem."*

International partnerships are clearly at the forefront of the university's agenda, and it has already formed a Global Advisory Board. The board's role is to help foster connections and collaboration with the international academic and scientific community, and propose new research areas and programmes for the university.

For associations focused on knowledge exchange, the formation of this new university furthers Dubai's appeal as an event destination. In years to come, the university, its academic leaders and students can be leveraged to enhance the programming of events hosted in the city – as well as providing access to cutting-edge research facilities and unique networking opportunities that can enrich the attendee experience.

By Remi Deve

Antwerp: A Gift from God?

When Susan Hayden, Conference Director for the International Spinal Cord Society (ISCoS), described Antwerp as "*a gift from God*," it wasn't just a figure of speech. Hosting the ISCoS Congress this year, Antwerp's commitment to accessibility and its efforts to welcome over 700 professionals specializing in spinal cord injury research left a lasting impression. As I experienced firsthand during a recent trip to the city, Antwerp's blend of history, innovation, and inclusivity makes it a standout destination for European and international conferences.

A City Open for Business & Innovation

From the moment I arrived at Hotel FranQ, a beautiful boutique hotel nestled in the heart of Antwerp, the city's vibrancy and hospitality were

immediately evident. Following a lunch at Hilton Antwerp Old Town (which can accommodate up to 1,200 guests over 13 flexible meeting rooms, including a grand ballroom!), I embarked on a guided tour that unveiled the city's rich

historical legacy intertwined with its status as a global hub for innovation. Often described as "*open for business*," Antwerp is both the economic and cultural capital of Belgium, a city with a "*metropolis with a human scale*," offering the benefits of a large city while maintaining a close-knit community feel. Antwerp boasts the world's first stock exchange, highlighting its longstanding role in international commerce.

Antwerp's River Scheldt is a key driver of its economy, facilitating global trade through one of Europe's largest ports. "*If you put your hand in the Scheldt, you're connected to the world*," remarked our guide during the tour. This sentiment is reflected in Antwerp's stature as a leader in industries such as sustainable chemistry, renewable energy, life sciences... and of course diamonds.

Antwerp's reputation as an innovation hub, supported by its 16,000-strong student population and world-class academic institutions, positions it as an ideal destination for conferences that blend business with advanced research. The city's strategic location in Europe, combined with ongoing investments in mobility infrastructure, has definitely solidified its status. Antwerp fosters



Central Station

© Woodmonkey

an ecosystem that connects academia, businesses, and government bodies, creating a fertile environment for knowledge-sharing and collaboration—key factors for hosting European and international events.

A Room with a ZOO

No visit to Antwerp from a meetings perspective would be complete without exploring its premier conference venue, A Room with a ZOO—one of the city's most remarkable spaces for hosting events.

Known for its unique concept, the venue is located within the Antwerp Zoo, one of the oldest zoos in the world. This distinctive feature not only adds a unique charm but also offers attendees the chance to experience an extraordinary blend of nature, culture, and modern conference facilities.

The venue offers more than just a scenic setting; it is equipped with state-of-the-art facilities that can accommodate a wide range of events, from smaller meetings to large-scale conventions. With capacities ranging up to 2,000 attendees in various rooms and exhibition spaces, A Room with a ZOO can easily adapt to events of any format. Its versatility made it an ideal location for international conferences like ISCoS 2024, where accessibility and advanced infrastructure were paramount.

Accessibility & Adaptability: ISCoS 2024

The 2024 ISCoS Congress, which brought together professionals specializing in spinal cord injury research and treatment late September this year, indeed required a venue that could meet stringent accessibility standards.

"Antwerp was a gift," Susan Hayden, ISCoS Conference Director, remarked, praising the city's accessible infrastructure, from its train station to A Room with a ZOO. With a significant number of wheelchair-using delegates,

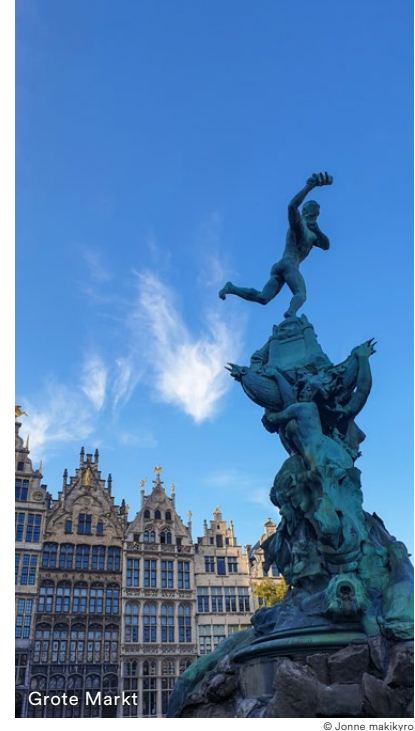
accessibility was the top priority. *"The venue was fantastic, especially in terms of accessibility, with more accessible bathrooms than I've ever seen in a venue globally,"* she noted.

Antwerp's hospitality and flexibility were on full display when the Radisson Blu's lift broke down just hours before the congress's gala dinner. Local partners, including Chocolate Nation, stepped in to create a temporary ramp in the venue. *"It could have been a disaster, but the way the city and local partners came together turned it into a triumph,"* Hayden recalled.

Beyond logistics, the congress has been a catalyst for change in Antwerp. Hayden explained how the event has raised awareness around the city's need for broader, more inclusive accessibility. *"This congress has inspired the city to rethink how it approaches accessibility—not just for specific events but in general,"* she said. Partners like Visit Antwerp, Visit Flanders Convention Bureau, and the Flemish Agency for Accessibility (Inter)—an agency specializing in accessibility for events, museums, and festivals—worked closely with the congress to address these issues, and the collaboration has led to long-term improvements. Antwerp is now committed to upgrading its infrastructure to better serve people with physical disabilities for future conferences and public events.

"Antwerp has embraced accessibility on a whole new level, and this congress has set a benchmark for future events. The city now has the tools and knowledge to be more inclusive, ensuring that all visitors, regardless of physical abilities, feel welcome," Susan noted, praising the development of a comprehensive 2.0 guide for hosting accessible events, which will ensure that Antwerp continues to improve its accessibility standards in the future.

Looking ahead, Hayden expressed optimism that the ISCoS Congress's legacy will not only influence Antwerp



but also encourage other cities to adopt similarly high standards. *"We can hold this event up as a beacon of excellence and say, 'This is achievable with cooperation and commitment,'"* she concluded.

A Future-Ready City: World Tunnel Congress 2027

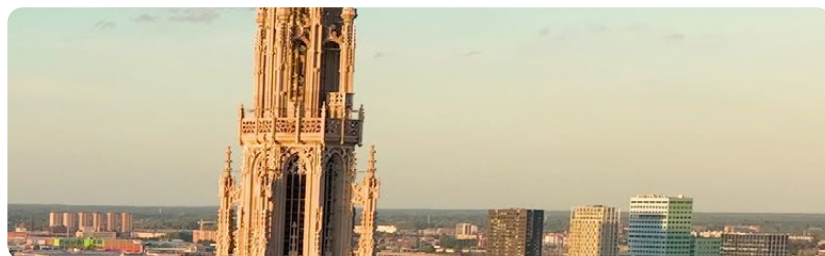
The future looks bright for Antwerp, as its reputation as a leading destination for international conferences continues to rise, with the city set to host the World Tunnel Congress in 2027, marking the first time the event will take place in Belgium. Scheduled from April 23 to April 29, 2027, the event will bring together over 2,700 global experts, researchers, and industry leaders to discuss advancements in tunneling and underground construction.

Johan Mignon, representing the Belgian Tunnel Association (ABTUS-BVOTS), said, *"We are extremely excited about the decision to choose Belgium – and Antwerp. The Oosterweel project, with its various tunnel complexes, has certainly been an asset in our candidacy. Of course, the Antwerp Convention Bureau provided invaluable support in submitting a winning bid, assisting us every step of the way."*



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The Oosterweel project is indeed one of the largest infrastructure projects in Europe, aimed at completing the ring road around Antwerp to improve traffic flow and reduce congestion. This ambitious initiative includes the construction of several tunnel complexes, designed to enhance connectivity while minimizing environmental impact.

Antwerp Convention Bureau CEO Tadeja Pivc Coudyser explained: *"Through Antwerp's new brand, 'The City is Your Venue,' we aim to integrate the vibrancy and cultural richness of our city into every aspect of the congress. This congress will serve as a perfect example of how effectively our bureau can facilitate major international events."*

Highlights of a few venues

Antwerp offers a variety of unique venues for meetings and events, each blending history, culture, and modern facilities. The MAS (Museum aan de Stroom) is an iconic architectural landmark located in the city's port district. With its striking red sandstone design and panoramic views of the city from its rooftop, MAS is not only a museum but also a versatile venue for events. Its spacious exhibition halls and meeting rooms can accommodate conferences, receptions, and dinners.

The Museum Plantin-Moretus, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, offers a more intimate and historical setting. Once the home and workshop of the renowned 16th-century printer Christophe Plantin, the museum houses original printing presses and manuscripts. This beautifully preserved building is ideal for smaller gatherings, offering a unique atmosphere steeped in literary and cultural history.

For high-scale events, Botanic Sanctuary Antwerp is a five-star hotel

and wellness retreat set in a restored 12th-century monastery. The venue combines heritage with modern elegance, offering state-of-the-art conference facilities, dining options, and beautiful botanical gardens. It's perfect for hosting high-end business meetings, conferences, and private events in a serene, green setting.

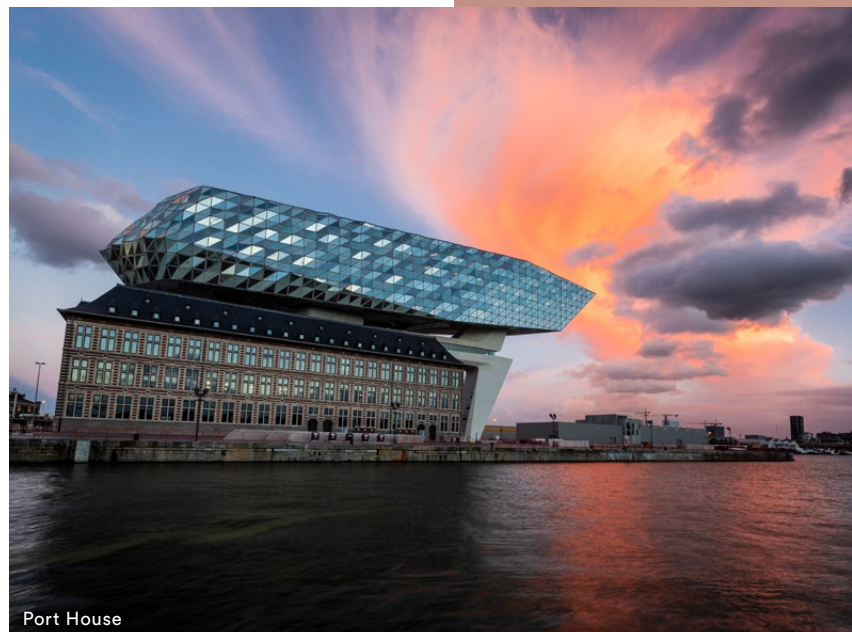
De Hofkamer, a hidden gem in Antwerp, is a beautifully restored 18th-century townhouse that offers an exclusive and atmospheric space for events. Its ornate interiors, including a famous mirrored salon, make it an ideal venue for private meetings, presentations, or cultural events, providing a taste of Antwerp's rich architectural and artistic heritage.

More info on Antwerp as a conference destination:
antwerpconventionbureau.be

Meet the Bureau's team at IBTM World in Barcelona, Stand G27, from 19 to 21 November.

ANTWERP: FAST FACTS FOR CONFERENCE PLANNERS

- **Strategic Location:** 30 minutes from Brussels International Airport
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- **Key Venue:** A Room with a ZOO, for up to 2,000 pax in plenary
- **Accommodation:** 6,800+ hotel rooms
- **Key Industries:** Port & Logistics, Sustainable Chemistry, Life Sciences, Life-Long Learning
- **Cultural Landmarks:** Museum Plantin-Moretus, Antwerp Cathedral, Rubens House, MAS, Porthouse
- **Connectivity:** Excellent public transportation system



By Remi Deve

New Hospitality Offerings & Unmatched Mobility in Vienna

As one of Europe's most culturally rich and well-connected cities, Vienna continues to establish itself as a premier destination for international conferences. While its historical charm and modern infrastructure have long been a draw for event organisers, Vienna's recent developments in hospitality and mobility make it an even more appealing choice.

Boutique, Timeless History & Modern Appeal

For those seeking charm in the heart of the city, the recently renovated Hotel zur Wiener Staatsoper and Hotel Astoria are standout choices, as both hotels offer a rich historical ambiance paired with modern comforts.

Hotel zur Wiener Staatsoper, nestled on Krugerstraße, has welcomed illustrious guests like Leonard Bernstein and Herbert

von Karajan. Its intimate boutique setup, with just twelve luxurious rooms and suites, now boasts a fresh interior design courtesy of British designer Nina Campbell, all while retaining its connection to Vienna's musical heritage. Meanwhile, Hotel Astoria has been meticulously restored to its former Art Deco grandeur, offering opulent accommodations and facilities for small meetings and press conferences.

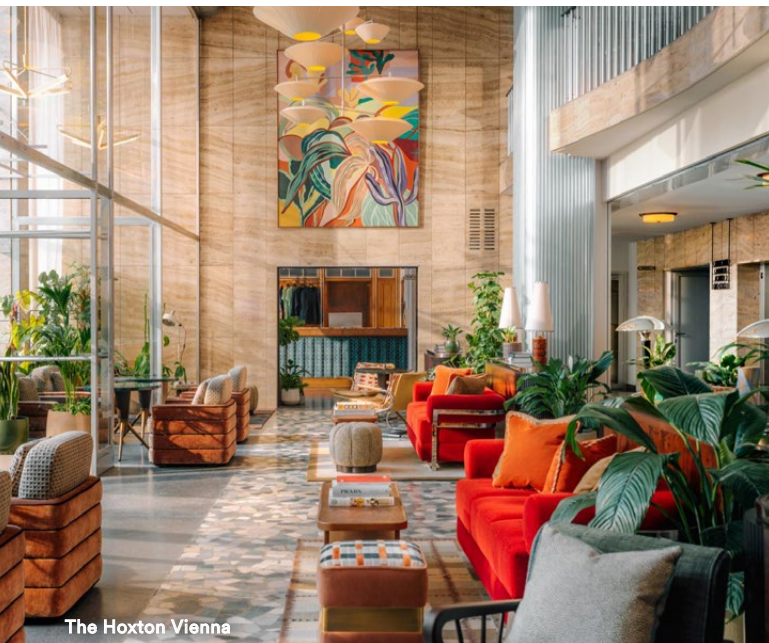
Vienna is also embracing mid-century modernism and large-scale luxury. The Hoxton Vienna, opened this year, is a prime example. Located near Stadtpark, it embodies the open-house concept that connects guests with the local neighborhood. This mid-century architectural jewel not only offers almost 200 rooms but also serves as a dynamic venue with event spaces for small conferences.

Similarly, the newly opened Imperial Riding School, part of Marriott International's Autograph Collection, combines history and modernity. Originally a 19th-century military riding school, the hotel's stately architecture has been revived with an interior makeover by the renowned Goddard Littlefair design firm. Its 342 rooms, along with a spacious conference space accommodating up to 432 people, make it an ideal venue for larger business events.

Smart Design & Sustainable Innovation

Vienna's hotel scene is also aligning with the city's sustainability goals: the recently launched Hotel Schani UNO City and H2 Hotel Wien Schönbrunn represent the city's forward-thinking approach.

Hotel Schani UNO City, located opposite the Vienna International Center and just a 10-minute walk from Austria



The Hoxton Vienna

© Julius Hirtzberger

Center Vienna, blends Viennese charm with smart technology. Its building automation system ensures minimal energy consumption by using infrared movement detectors and an integrated system that controls lighting, heating, and air conditioning.

In the same way, H2 Hotel Wien Schönbrunn prides itself on sustainable design, boasting platinum LEED certification. The hotel's innovative infrastructure uses waste water from the nearby Wiental canal for heating and cooling, while photovoltaic technology generates electricity. Both hotels offer family-friendly amenities and are ideal for eco-conscious travelers attending conferences at nearby venues.

A City Made for Connected Conferences

What truly enhances the appeal of these new hotels is Vienna's exceptional public transport system, which seamlessly connects visitors to all corners of the city. Whether staying at The Hoxton just minutes from Wien Mitte, with its 16-minute direct train link to the airport, or at Hampton by Hilton Vienna City West near Schönbrunn Palace, conference delegates can navigate the city with ease.

Vienna's public transport system is not only extensive but also highly efficient, offering fast, easy, and affordable ways for delegates to get around. With five underground lines, a comprehensive tram network, and buses, Vienna ensures that getting from one part of the city to another is smooth and stress-free. For conference attendees, this means minimal time spent on logistics and more time to focus on the business at hand.

The city centre, a key transport hub, plays a pivotal role in connecting the city to the airport. As mentioned, the City Airport Train (CAT), which departs every 30 minutes, offers a quick and reliable way for international delegates to travel between the city and Vienna International Airport. This makes Vienna particularly attractive for time-conscious business travelers who require hassle-free transportation to and from their conference venues.

Vienna's public transport system is also fully integrated, meaning one ticket grants access to all forms of transportation—whether it's the metro, tram, or bus.



This seamless integration makes navigating the city straightforward for visitors, especially for international attendees who might be unfamiliar with the local transit system. The city's affordable transport passes, including short-term tickets tailored for tourists and conference visitors, add another layer of convenience.

Additionally, the Austrian Federal Railways (ÖBB), provide connections to major European cities, positioning Vienna as a gateway for international attendees. With direct daytime connections to cities like Budapest, Prague, and Munich – as well as overnight train connections to Brussels, Zurich, Berlin and Paris, to mention just a few – the city's central location enhances its appeal as a regional hub for business events.

Accessibility Meets Sustainability

Last but not least, Vienna's commitment to sustainability is another factor that sets it apart. In recent years, the city has taken significant steps to promote green mobility, including expanding its network of electric buses and investing in bike-sharing schemes. Delegates can easily rent bicycles at various stations throughout the city, encouraging eco-friendly transport options that reduce the carbon footprint of large conferences.

Additionally, Vienna's walkability is a major asset. Many of the city's key conference venues, such as the Austria Center Vienna and the Messe Wien, are located near major hotels and transport links. HOFBURG Vienna, Vienna's third congress center, is located right in the city center. This proximity allows attendees to move easily between their accommodations, event venues, and the city's renowned cultural attractions, maximizing their experience both inside and outside the conference halls.

For more information on organising a conference in Vienna, visit meeting.vienna.info.

By Remi Deve

Dijon: the Next Global Wine Capital?

Dijon's recent inauguration of the International Organisation of Vine and Wine (OIV) headquarters, followed by the 45th World Congress of Vine and Wine, which drew over 1,000 participants to the city this very October, marks a pivotal moment in the city's evolution. Rooted in centuries of viticulture, Dijon is stepping into a global role, showcasing its unique blend of heritage, accessibility, and dynamic innovation.

The decision to locate the OIV headquarters in Dijon is a testament to the city's deep historical ties to viticulture. The Burgundy region, of which Dijon is the heart, has been synonymous with wine for centuries. The surrounding vineyards are not only central to the city's cultural identity but are also recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Luigi Moio, President of the OIV at the time of writing this article, expressed that the relocation aligns with the organisation's need for a more suitable base for its current activities, emphasizing the importance of Dijon's international appeal and its heritage in the wine sector. *"The decision of the General Assembly responds to a request expressed by the International Organisation of Vine and Wine, which has been based in France since its creation in 1924, to find premises more suited to its activity,"* he said in an interview with Luxurious Magazine.

The ancestral connection to vine cultivation is indeed a crucial part of why Dijon has been chosen as the new home of the OIV. The presence of the organisation, which brings together over 50 member countries, amplifies Dijon's standing on the global stage, reinforcing its reputation as a centre of excellence in the world of wine.

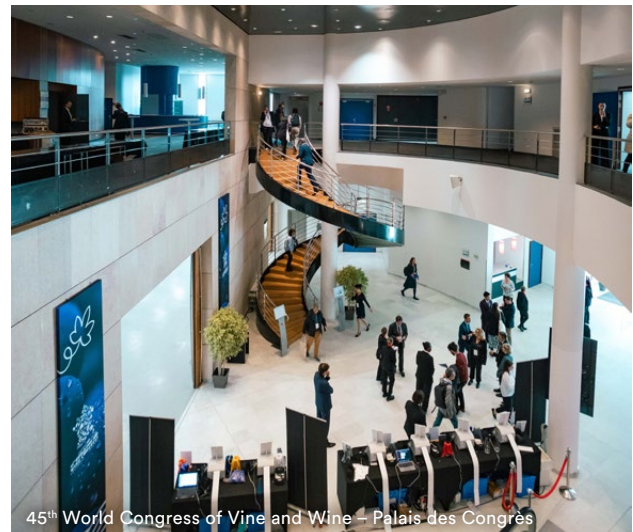
Reshaping the city

The inauguration of the OIV headquarters is more than just a symbolic move; it is accompanied by significant urban transformations that are reshaping the city. Streets around the Cité Internationale de la Gastronomie et du Vin are being



45th World Congress of Vine and Wine – Auditorium

© Dijon Bourgogne Tourisme & Congrès – Vargas Photo



45th World Congress of Vine and Wine – Palais des Congrès

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Place de la Libération

© Dijon Bourgogne Tourisme & Congrès – Alice Colas

revitalized, with pedestrian zones and newly planted trees creating a greener, more welcoming urban landscape.

These efforts reflect a broader ambition for Dijon—to create a legacy that benefits both the city’s residents and its international visitors. This transformation is seen as a way to breathe new life into the city, reinforcing its connection to its rich gastronomic and wine heritage while preparing it for a sustainable future.

Dijon’s residents are also playing a central role in this transformation. The city has involved the local community in the celebrations surrounding the OIV’s inauguration, inviting citizens to explore the new headquarters, participate in exhibitions, and attend various cultural events throughout the city. This engagement ensures that the people of Dijon are not just observers but active participants in the city’s rising international prominence. The entire city, from taxis to hotels and restaurants, was mobilized to accommodate and celebrate these events, showcasing a collective pride in this historic moment – something that other associations are invited to replicate, should they choose Dijon as their next conference destination.

Fostering international collaborations

Strategically located, Dijon’s accessibility further strengthens its position. The city is just a short 1-hour 35-minute high-speed train ride from Paris, and within a few hours of Zurich and Lausanne, making it an easily reachable hub for international visitors.

This proximity to major European cities enhances Dijon’s potential to attract global events and foster international collaborations, particularly in wine and agriculture. Its accessibility not only boosts its appeal for business and

tourism but also for hosting international events like the World Congress of Vine and Wine.

However, Dijon’s appeal goes beyond its historical roots and location. The city is at the forefront of innovation in agri-food, sustainability, and gastronomy, making it a dynamic hub for research and development in these fields.

The Vitagora agri-food cluster, a centre of excellence, embodies this forward-thinking approach. Bringing together academic researchers, industry professionals, and startups, Vitagora has become a leader in food innovation, focusing on the entire value chain from vine culture and fermentation to the ecological transition of agriculture. This commitment to sustainable and forward-looking practices places Dijon not only as a wine capital but as a vital player in the global movement towards more sustainable food systems.

Patrick Génie, Manager of the Dijon Convention Bureau, said: *“The success of the World Congress of Vine and Wine, as well as the preceding International Ministerial Conference, showcases our ambition and expertise in business events. With nearly 5,000 hotel rooms and numerous event facilities, Dijon is an ideal destination for hosting large events, offering the perfect opportunity to successfully combine professional gatherings with experiences you can’t have elsewhere.”*

As Dijon embraces its new status as the next global wine capital, the city is carving out a path that combines its rich past with a future of sustainable innovation, leaving a lasting impact both locally and globally – inviting European and international associations to take part in a journey that is yet to be written.

More information

congres@otdijon.com / www.destinationdijon.com

By Vicky Koffa

How Monaco is Pioneering Responsible Tourism & Events

If it was once known for its high-profile events, Monaco has also become a frontrunner in sustainable tourism and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Through action plans and strategic partnerships, the Principality demonstrates its commitment to reducing its environmental impact and promoting responsible tourism. Boardroom spoke to Estelle Antognelli, who is at the heart of this transformation as responsible for CSR at the Monaco Convention Bureau.



Can you explain the role of the CSR unit you lead at the Monaco Convention Bureau?

Our CSR department's primary mission is to make Monaco a sustainable destination for tourists and businesses alike. In 2022, we launched an action plan following the release of our *White Paper for Responsible Tourism in Monaco*. This document helped define our CSR strategy, aligning it with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Our efforts are centred around five key areas: educating and training stakeholders, improving communication on sustainability, managing the destination's environmental impacts, promoting inclusive tourism, and measuring our actions' effectiveness.

Monaco is globally known for its luxury tourism. How has the Principality adapted to include sustainable practices, especially in the tourism sector?

The tourism sector here has embraced sustainability with great enthusiasm. Over 80% of our hotels hold environmental certifications like

Green Globe or Green Key, and 97% of them have signed the National Energy Transition Pact, committing to reduce energy consumption, improve waste management, and promote sustainable mobility.

Restaurants have followed suit, sourcing local and organic produce. Several chefs maintain their own vegetable gardens and are actively fighting food waste by promoting the use of 'La Petite Boîte' – the local version of the doggy bag.

While Monaco is a highly urbanised area, we've worked hard to protect and expand green spaces, which now cover about 20% of the territory. In terms of mobility, our small size – just 2 square kilometres – makes Monaco an ideal walking destination, supplemented by eco-friendly transportation options.

How do these sustainability efforts benefit business events held in Monaco?

The business events sector in Monaco is fully equipped to offer sustainable event solutions. Our key venue, the Grimaldi Forum, is ISO 14001 certified and will soon achieve ISO 20121, a

sustainability standard for the events industry. This guarantees that event organisers can easily implement sustainable practices. Furthermore, our 'Sustainable Event Managers Guide' was introduced to assist planners in organising responsible events, providing details on everything from energy-efficient logistics to local, eco-certified suppliers.

One of the most impactful tools we've developed is our online carbon calculator, created in collaboration with Monaco's Mission for the Energy Transition. Available on our website, it helps event organisers estimate their event's carbon footprint and offers recommendations on how to minimise it. The calculator has two versions: a simplified option for quick estimates and a comprehensive version that takes more details into account.

How do you ensure that your sustainability efforts are in line with international standards, and what certifications have been achieved?

Sustainability is embedded in Monaco's tourism DNA, and we strive to uphold the highest international standards. In addition to the certifications of the Grimaldi Forum, the Principality signed the *Glasgow Declaration* under the United Nations' Tourism Initiative, which urges tourism operators to reduce their carbon emissions. By committing to these international agreements and standards, we ensure our sustainability practices are credible, measurable, and transparent.

Can you highlight any successful collaborations with local

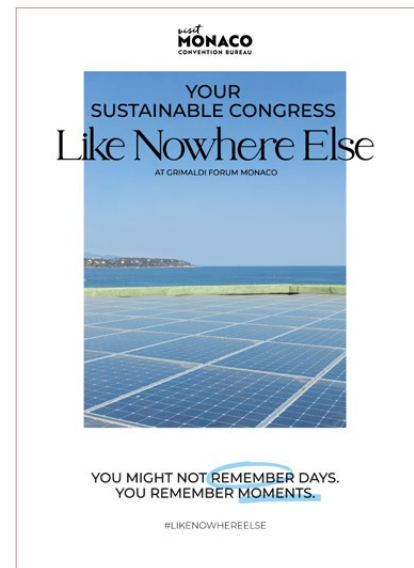
businesses or organisations to enhance sustainability at events?

Collaboration is at the heart of everything we do. The Monaco Convention Bureau works closely with hotels, restaurants, and local service providers to create sustainable options for events. For instance, almost all our partners, including hotels and congress venues, have their own Green Teams or CSR Managers, ensuring that sustainability practices are integrated at every level.

One of our notable collaborations was with Luxepack, the premier trade show for luxury packaging. In both 2023 and 2024, we helped organise a special Paris-Monaco train journey, which dramatically reduced the carbon footprint of attendees by replacing flights with a rail option.

Monaco has made remarkable strides in sustainability. What feedback have you received from event organisers regarding these efforts?

The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Many of our clients are impressed by the depth of our sustainability initiatives. For some, it has even become a deciding factor when choosing Monaco for their events. Nowadays, many companies are required to include CSR metrics in their annual reports, and Monaco's sustainability credentials are seen as a huge advantage. By choosing Monaco, they are not only ensuring a top-tier event but also aligning with sustainable values, which adds an extra layer of prestige and responsibility to their event.



What are the future plans for advancing sustainability in the tourism and events sectors in Monaco?

Our current action plan, launched in June 2022, will run until June 2025. During this period, we are continually assessing our progress and developing new ways to minimise environmental impact. For example, we're further integrating eco-design into our summer exhibitions and maintaining sustainable teleworking and flexible working hours for our staff. We are also focused on fighting food insecurity and waste, redistributing unused food to local charities. After 2025, we'll evaluate our actions and define the next steps to keep Monaco at the forefront of sustainable tourism.



Scan this QR code if you want to organise your next sustainable event in Monaco.

More information:
Estelle Antognelli, Head of
the C.S.R Department /
conventionbureau@gouv.mc

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A Cyberattack Is More Expensive Than a Natural Disaster

Bern - THE cyber capital. This is the declared aim of the organisers of the Swiss Cyber Security Days 2023, who were supported by the Bern Convention Bureau in organising the first event in the federal city.

The Swiss Cyber Security Days took place in Bern on 20 and 21 September 2023. An event in the BERNEXPO event hall, where an exchange took place on this exciting and important topic. Unlike other trade fairs, the focus was on ensuring that non-experts also had access to the information. A platform was created for everyone, by everyone. Because as the organiser Nicolas Mayencourt mentioned several times: *"The topic concerns everyone. Whether SMEs or large companies."*

He and Tom Winter, CEO of BERNEXPO, have set themselves the goal of making Bern the cyber capital.

But why Bern? There are many reasons.

Bern is not only easily accessible and has a top infrastructure, it is also the political centre of Switzerland and home to many embassies and national and international organisations.

Thanks to these conditions, embassy representatives were present at the combined trade fair and congress for the first time. This was a huge added value.

Bern is also ideally located in the geographical centre of Switzerland.

It is the home of politics and numerous international institutions. The distances are short. Be it travelling by train or plane to the federal capital or the short distances on site. Many things are within walking distance. If you do need to use public transport, guests can travel free of charge with the Bern Ticket.

Finally, the Bern Convention Bureau is a great help when it comes to organising and planning events, trade fairs or congresses. For example, a hotel contingent was made available for the Swiss Cyber Security Days, which made things a lot easier for the participants and event professionals.

In spring 2025, Europe's second greenest capital will be enriched by another highlight: the new BERNEXPO festival hall will open. This will provide event organisers with a state-of-the-art venue with space for up to 9,000 people.

Are you planning an event in Bern yourself?
The Bern Convention Bureau can advise, support and connect you with the right people:
bern.com/convention-bureau

TIPS FOR YOUR OWN CYBER SECURITY

1. Keep software up-to-date
2. Get a password management system
3. Multiple authentication via SMS or app
4. Create regular unalterable backups
5. Always have a backup copy of the data to hand



More info on Switzerland as a convention destination:
myriam.winnepenninckx@switzerland.com /
www.MySwitzerland.com/meetings

By Remi Deve

Singapore: Advancing Healthcare Through World-Class Medical Events

Singapore is a prime destination for medical and healthcare industry events. As a strategic gateway to the Asia-Pacific market, the country has positioned itself as a premier hub for applied health sciences, biotechnology, MedTech, and pharmaceuticals, making it an ideal convening ground for healthcare professionals and industry leaders from around the world looking to make a lasting impact with their conferences.

Singapore's Medical Cluster: All-Round Innovation & Collaboration

Singapore has long been recognised as a global leader in healthcare and biomedical innovation. The city-state's success in the healthcare sector

is built on a foundation of world-class infrastructure, a pro-business environment, and a strong commitment to research and development (R&D). These attributes make Singapore an attractive destination for multinational

corporations and startups in medical sciences, as well as being a preferred location for hosting medical and healthcare events.

One of the key growth pillars of Singapore's healthcare ecosystem is its thriving MedTech industry. Singapore is home to more than 400 MedTech companies, employing over 16,000 people, and has seen significant growth in this sector over the past decade. Between 2012 and 2022, MedTech manufacturing output grew by a remarkable 280% according to Enterprise Singapore, highlighting Singapore's expertise to scale and innovate in this field. The country's strong base of engineering capabilities, supported by a vibrant ecosystem of suppliers, local partners, and quality assurance standards, allows it to produce high-value medical products for global markets. These include cardiovascular implantables, vision care devices, hearing aids, and diagnostic tools, which are essential for patients worldwide.



International Team for Implantology (ITI) World Symposium brought together over 5,500 dental professionals from more than 100 countries.

The city-state's HealthTech sector is also gaining momentum, with a particular focus on connected devices, big data, and patient-centric care. HealthTech startups based in Singapore are addressing some of the most pressing healthcare challenges, from remote patient monitoring to telemedicine solutions. Singapore's pharmaceutical and biotechnology sectors have also seen rapid development, contributing to the country's status as a regional healthcare powerhouse. More than 30 of the world's top pharmaceutical companies, including GlaxoSmithKline, Pfizer, Novartis, and Sanofi, have established manufacturing and R&D facilities in the city. These global players leverage Singapore's highly skilled workforce, advanced manufacturing capabilities, and robust intellectual property protections to develop and produce innovative medicines and biologics. For instance, GlaxoSmithKline operates an advanced manufacturing facility for next generation cancer treatment, utilising automation and pioneering new processes in medicine production.

A Robust R&D Ecosystem

A major factor driving the growth of Singapore's biomedical and healthcare sectors is the government's substantial investment in research and innovation. Under the Research Innovation and Enterprise (RIE) 2025 plan, Singapore has committed S\$25 billion to public sector research, with a significant portion allocated to the domain of Human Health and Potential. This investment is designed to foster new

UPCOMING MEDICAL & HEALTHCARE EVENTS IN SINGAPORE

- **World Sleep 2025** – A biennial congress attracting almost 4,000 sleep physicians, researchers, and clinicians from over 70 countries – for the first time in South East Asia.
- **International Conference on Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery (ICOMS) 2025** – The flagship educational event for oral and maxillofacial surgeons, bringing together 1,800 attendees – for the first time in South East Asia.
- **Asian Pacific Digestive Week 2025** – A major scientific congress focused on digestive diseases, expected to draw 3,500 delegates.
- **International Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Association World Congress 2026** – Held for the first time in Southeast Asia, the event will focus on diseases of the liver, pancreas, and biliary tract, and is expected to draw 3,000 delegates.

medical breakthroughs and create an ecosystem where companies can collaborate with academic institutions, research organisations, and healthcare providers to bring innovative solutions to market. Singapore's extensive network of research institutions, including the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR), plays a crucial role in advancing biomedical science and providing a pipeline of discoveries that can be translated into practical healthcare applications.

In this context, Singapore has developed a robust R&D ecosystem, with more than 25 R&D centres established by multinational companies. These centres collaborate with local startups and research institutions to develop next-generation medical devices and solutions, positioning Singapore as a leader. For example, in May 2023, Thermo Fisher Scientific opened a state-of-the-art sterile facility in Singapore to manufacture vaccines

and therapeutics, demonstrating the country's preparedness for future health crises and its ability to scale up production rapidly.

Beyond its manufacturing prowess, Singapore is actively cultivating innovation in health sciences through initiatives that encourage collaboration between government agencies, universities, and the private sector. This includes the establishment of centres like the Experimental Drug Development Centre and the Target Translation Consortium, which focus on accelerating drug discovery and development.

As a medical conference destination, Singapore's ability to bring together global healthcare professionals, researchers, and industry leaders has made it a prime location for events that shape the future of medicine. The country's proximity to the Asia-Pacific region, its excellent infrastructure, and its reputation for safety and efficiency make it a highly attractive destination for international conferences. With a thriving healthcare and biomedical ecosystem, Singapore serves as a hub for knowledge exchange, innovation, and collaboration.

Case Study: ITI World Symposium 2024

A prime example of Singapore's appeal as a destination for medical events is the ITI (International Team for Implantology) World Symposium, held in May 2024. The symposium, which brought together over 5,500 dental professionals from more than 100 countries to the Singapore Expo, highlighted Singapore's unique advantages as a host city for large-scale medical meetings.



The ITI World Symposium featured lectures, exhibition booths, and immersive hands-on workshops over three days.

The ITI World Symposium is the world's largest event dedicated to implant dentistry, providing a platform for leading clinicians and researchers to discuss the latest scientific advancements and best practices. The 2024 event was centered around the theme "Every patient has a story: Evidence meets patient perspectives to guide clinical care," which reflected ITI's commitment to patient-centered approaches in implant dentistry. The three-day event featured lectures, live-commented videos, and immersive hands-on workshops, allowing participants to gain practical skills while engaging with cutting-edge research.

The decision to host the symposium in Singapore was driven by several factors, including the country's strategic location in Southeast Asia and its reputation for safety, efficiency, and world-class infrastructure. *"Singapore's accessibility, exceptional infrastructure, and cultural diversity made it a premier destination for hosting the ITI World Symposium 2024,"* said Sven Pfeiffer, Marketing & Event Manager at the ITI Foundation. Additionally, Singapore's strong presence in the Asian market, combined with the entire region's rapidly growing demand for implant dentistry solutions, made it an ideal



Sven Pfeiffer

choice for the symposium, which sought to address the educational needs of dental professionals throughout Asia.

"Despite being a large association, our organising team is relatively small, which underscores our reliance on trustworthy local partners to manage the complexities of hosting a significant event such as the ITI World Symposium," added Pfeiffer. *"Throughout the entire period, the Singapore Expo and Singapore Tourism Board (STB) provided excellent support, ensuring a smooth and efficient planning process. Their collaborative approach facilitated seamless communication and coordination among all parties involved, which is crucial for a successful event of this scale."*

The ITI World Symposium featured several networking opportunities, including a beachfront dinner party on Sentosa Island, which offered attendees a chance to relax and connect in a more informal setting. *"The choice of Sentosa Island, known for its beautiful beaches and vibrant atmosphere, offered a perfect setting for this relaxed yet dynamic networking event, adding a unique flair to the ITI World Symposium's social program,"* said Pfeiffer.

Altogether, the ITI World Symposium 2024 was a huge success at every level, as it offered an ideal setting for dental professionals to reconnect with their peers and establish new relationships. *"The unique interior architecture of the event, reflecting aspects of the vibrant host city Singapore was especially developed*

and built to house the lively industry exhibition and to provide participants with a perfect environment to promote networking, exchange and relaxation," he added.

"Participants also appreciated Singapore's strategic location, which serves as an ideal gateway to a multitude of holiday destinations across Southeast Asia. After the busy days at the ITI World Symposium, many attendees were eager to explore nearby attractions and beautiful locales, enhancing their overall experience and allowing them to unwind after a successful event with a well-deserved vacation," Pfeiffer concluded.

Legacy-building with the International Liver Transplantation Society (ILTS) Congress

Looking ahead, Singapore is poised to continue its legacy of hosting impactful medical conferences. One such event is the upcoming International Liver Transplantation Society (ILTS) Congress, scheduled to take place in May 2025. The congress, which will bring together experts in liver transplantation from around the world, will focus on cutting-edge technologies and advancements in the field.

A/Prof Alfred Kow, Senior Consultant at the National University Hospital and Council Member of the ILTS, explained that Singapore was chosen as the host destination for the ILTS 2025 Congress due to its advanced liver transplant

ecosystem and innovative approach to transplantation.

"Singapore has one of the most mature liver transplant ecosystems in the Asian region, and we continue to push the boundaries in liver transplantation, developing minimally invasive techniques and advancing the use of AI and precision medicine," said A/Prof Alfred Kow.



A/Prof Alfred Kow

"Singapore also is well-known for its safety, efficiency, cleanliness, and futuristic outlook. It has a very open economy. The healthcare standards and quality are also internationally recognised – which is naturally attractive for medical conference."

In addition to fostering scientific exchange, the ILTS 2025 Congress will prioritise legacy-building initiatives that honor the contributions of organ donors. The congress will feature a symbolic tree-planting initiative, with each tree representing an organ donor and serving as a lasting reminder of the gift of life. *"Organ transplantation symbolizes the continuity of life, and our legacy projects aim to raise awareness about the transformative power of organ donation,"* A/Prof Alfred Kow added.

Singapore's commitment to legacy building extends beyond individual

events. The STB has been instrumental in helping organisers design meaningful initiatives that create lasting positive impact on both the local and global healthcare communities. Through its MICE Event Legacy Toolkit and partnerships with local organisations, STB has supported the development of initiatives that go beyond the conference itself, ensuring that the outcomes of these events continue to benefit society long after they have concluded.

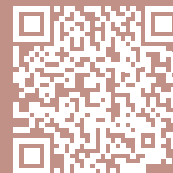
"We have received tremendous support from STB in crafting the legacy projects, beginning with the provision of a legacy toolkit that outlined a structured approach to formulating meaningful initiatives. STB's role in connecting us with the right partners and organisations to execute our initiatives has been crucial, bridging gaps and ensuring our projects have the necessary support and resources. Their support has significantly enhanced the potential of our legacy projects to create lasting, positive change," A/Prof Alfred Kow said.

Find out how Singapore can partner you to create impactful business events here
www.visitsingapore.com/mice

INSIDE SINGAPORE'S MICE EVENT LEGACY TOOLKIT

This guide provides event organisers with the key knowledge and resources needed to create events that leave a meaningful, long-term impact on the community, host destination, and society as a whole.

- **Practical Tools:** Gain actionable insights and steps to design and implement impactful legacy initiatives.
- **Clear Frameworks:** Learn how to define and measure legacy initiatives and event outcomes effectively.
- **Case Studies:** Draw inspiration from real-world examples of successful legacy projects held in Singapore that have benefited both the community and the environment.



Scan this code to download the Toolkit:



A view of Marina Bay from the ArtScience Museum

© Singapore Tourism Board

By Jan Lichota & Remi Deve

Brussels Fosters Association Community Empowerment

November 2024 marks the first anniversary of The Association Place, the gathering place for the international and European associations community in Brussels. Located in the heart of the European Quarter, The Association Place (TAP) offers a unique and inviting setting for the association community to come together. As Brussels' premier first-stop shop—a dedicated space that's all about fostering connections and collaboration—it stands as the foremost destination for the international associations community.



Inside The Association Place

The Association Place

An initiative of the Convention and Association Bureau of visit.brussels, The Association Place has been instrumental in uniting various activities aimed at international associations within Brussels throughout its entire first year of operation.

Streamlined through the monthly Association Connect networking series, tailored for association professionals, these events are designed to empower and inspire by addressing key topics such as branding, influence, networking strategies, and management. With a focus on active participation and limited to 35 attendees, the sessions allowed speakers to engage the audience using various formats, covering EU affairs, communications, and association management across the two meeting rooms of TAP.

In September, The Association Place hosted its Welcome Days, where various information sessions allowed attendees to learn more about practical

and urban developments in Brussels. The event featured sessions on meeting and event organisation, the evolution of the European Quarter, and practical aspects of living in Brussels, delivered by the Expats Welcome Desk. Additionally, a special session on association management, focusing on game design and association strategy, was presented by Association by Design.

The premises were also available for associations, its affiliates and partners. Among others the Association Leader's Toolkit was launched by the European Society of Association Executives (ESAE) in autumn, while the Rainbow Map Europe was presented by ILGA to the media in spring.

The Association Place will continue to strengthen its role as the first point of contact for associations based abroad, serving as the primary gateway for both Brussels-based and visiting professionals to become part of the city's vibrant association community. Brussels aims to further develop its unique, welcoming, and secure environment where international associations can convene, connect,



© Jean-Paul Remy

and collaborate amid an ever-evolving local and global landscape.

Brussels & the International Associations Community

Today, Brussels' long-standing relationship with the international association community enters a new phase. Changes within the city and the associations themselves have led to a mutual recognition of needs and opportunities, fostering ongoing dialogue and active engagement across various fields for all stakeholders.

The capital of Europe consistently scores high in the Union of International Associations (UIA) rankings. In 2024 a dedicated city report was released by UIA on Brussels showing the evolution in number and types of associations present in the city, as well as those organising events on its territory.

In the last twenty years, from 2004 to 2023, the number of associations with headquarters in Brussels has grown by 28%. While a wide range of sectors are represented, no single sector dominates the city's association landscape. However, trade federations and regional representations make up a significant portion, with active involvement in areas such as agriculture and food,

communications, medicine, law, social sciences, technology, and commerce.

In relation to association meetings, Brussels has been ranked #1 for association meetings for over a decade and has retained its top spot for 15 years. This position is probably influenced by the high number of association headquarters located in Brussels, the presence of a well-established meetings business, and the specificity of a legal status for international non-profit organisations present in the Belgian law.

The International Associations Community & the European Quarter

Most international associations are based in the European Quarter, a district that recently introduced its own brand. This branding is visible throughout the area and helps create a connection between museums, shops, and both private and public entities operating there.

A dedicated network for the European quarter regularly organises information sessions on its development and summaries are also shared within the programme of The Association Place. Moreover, international associations may also be involved and move forward

together in pushing the brand to an international audience.

Significant urban changes are set to occur, including the redevelopment of the Schuman roundabout, the office park, and the Cinquantenaire Park area. These transformations offer associations the opportunity to actively participate in the reshaping of an entire urban district—something quite unique on a global scale.

Empowering the community through knowledge, active participation, and involvement in The Association Place program, while also showcasing the city through other projects, goes beyond simple networking—it's about sharing the future of a destination with all who visit or are based there. Brussels is renowned for its diverse architectural styles and the unique character they create, much like the lasting connections international associations can build over time.

To learn more about what The Association Place can do for you scan this QR Code:



By Vicky Koffa

Sarawak Revolutionises Impact Measurement

A true leader in legacy creation, Sarawak is making significant strides once more in how business events are measured and understood. Moving beyond the traditional economic focus, Business Events Sarawak (BESarawak) and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) are collaborating on Malaysia's first-ever economic and legacy impact study. Aligning with Sarawak's Post COVID-19 Development Strategy (PCDS) 2030 and its vision for a data-driven, sustainable society, this initiative will be a game-changer for the region.

The introduction of a cutting-edge Legacy Impact Measurement System (dashboard) will further strengthen Sarawak's position as a leader in sustainable business events. Amelia Roziman, CEO of BESarawak, talks about the nature of this system: *"We're collaborating with UNIMAS to structure the study components and co-develop an AI-powered system that meets the needs of our stakeholders and provides a comprehensive view of the industry's full impact."*



Beyond Economic Gains

Launched at the end of the summer, the new impact study breaks away from the traditional method of measuring success through economic indicators alone. According to Professor Dr Lo May Chiun from UNIMAS, who leads the legacy initiative, the research goes much deeper. *"When we talk about the impact of business events, it's easy to focus on the immediate economic benefits. But at UNIMAS we recognise, thanks to the vision and support of Business Events Sarawak, the importance of looking at the bigger picture – the long-term, positive changes these events can bring to Sarawak and its people,"* she explains.

The study is a cornerstone of the Legacy Impact Master Action Plan (2023–2025), which aims to evaluate how business events in Sarawak affect the broader community, environment, and governance. By focusing on legacy impact, Sarawak ensures that the events hosted in the region contribute to its durable prosperity. This research will allow organisers and stakeholders to see how their events boost local development, promote inclusivity, and drive innovation – critical goals outlined in Sarawak's PCDS 2030. *"The aim is to develop a robust framework for economic and legacy impact measurements that would tolerate trends and changes,"* adds Roziman.

Shaping Sarawak's Future

The study aligns directly with the state's broader goals of achieving economic prosperity, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability by 2030. Professor Lo says:

"By attracting international participants and investors, these events stimulate local economies. Increased spending in sectors such as hospitality, tourism, and retail will generate revenue, create job opportunities, and support local businesses."

Furthermore, well-curated events facilitate the transfer of knowledge, best practices, and cutting-edge advancements. This exchange grows local expertise, increases innovation possibilities, and contributes to the overall advancement of key sectors in Sarawak. Roziman says: *"With evidence-backed findings on how those sectors perform and their growth potential, it will help the Sarawak government identify areas that need attention, optimise resource allocation, and develop or improve policies that promote sustainable growth."*

Professor Dr Lo also emphasises the importance of the study's inclusivity aspect: *"Business events raise awareness of our heritage and strengthen the community's sense of identity and pride."* In addition to economic benefits, the research looks into how these events can preserve Sarawak's rich cultural diversity, promote cross-cultural understanding, and create opportunities for underrepresented groups, ensuring that the positive impacts are shared widely.

From an environmental perspective, the study encourages sustainable event practices, aligning with global trends towards eco-friendly business operations. The legacy study will track these practices and highlight how Sarawak's natural resources can be preserved for future generations while still welcoming international business events.

An AI Tool for Change

A key element of this new initiative is the introduction of the Legacy Impact Measurement System, a first-of-its-kind dashboard for Sarawak. This AI-powered tool will allow organisers to monitor, measure, and report the impact of business events in real-time. Roziman explains: *"We are making the intangible tangible by providing a structured approach to evaluate and communicate the long-term values of business events."*



Borneo Cultures Museum, second largest museum in Southeast Asia

What sets this dashboard apart is its holistic approach, capturing both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a 360-degree view of a business event's influence. It doesn't just capture immediate data such as attendance or revenue; it also analyses factors such as job creation, innovation, and even social cohesion within the community. For event organisers, this means having the ability to make data-driven decisions and design more purposeful events.

The dashboard is a strategic asset that will transform how business events are planned and evaluated in Sarawak. According to Dr Lo, *"the system allows organisers to generate customisable reports and visualisations that clearly demonstrate the long-term value of their events to stakeholders, sponsors, and the community. This transparency is crucial for building trust, attracting investment, and solidifying Sarawak's reputation as a hub for impactful events."*

The combination of the impact study and the legacy dashboard mark a new path for Sarawak's future not only in the meetings industry landscape, but as an overall sustainable community. Dato Sri Abdul Karim Rahman Hamzah, Minister of Tourism, Creative Industry and Performing Arts Sarawak captured the essence of this ambitious project: *"Legacy is not a thought but an achievable outcome."*

More info on Sarawak as a conference destination:
businesseventssarawak.com

By Remi Deve

Kuala Lumpur: The Emerging Hub for Bleisure Travel

The concept of "Bleisure"—the fusion of business and leisure travel—is becoming a key factor in how international associations and event organisers select their next conference destination. More business travelers are seeking to extend their stays beyond their professional commitments, enjoying the cultural, recreational, and experiential benefits of their host cities. And when it comes to offering the ideal mix of business infrastructure and leisure opportunities, Kuala Lumpur (KL) and the Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC) are positioned as front-runners in the world of bleisure travel.

Kuala Lumpur is emerging as a regional hub for both business and leisure travel, offering an unparalleled blend of world-class infrastructure, cultural richness, and affordability. Situated strategically in Southeast Asia, KL is accessible to travelers from all corners of the globe. Ranked as the second most internationally linked airport globally in OAG's Megahubs 2024 report, Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) offers seamless access to over 100 international destinations, while the KL's advanced public transportation network ensures that both business and leisure

travelers can easily navigate between meetings and tourist attractions.

John Burke, General Manager at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre (KLCC), highlights the city's unique position: *"As a vibrant city with something to offer everyone, Kuala Lumpur is the perfect backdrop for memorable events. When you bring your event to our Centre, you're not just choosing a venue; you're giving attendees an unforgettable experience, surrounded by a unique blend of culture, excitement, and hospitality. Kuala Lumpur adds that extra something, making every moment more memorable and meaningful."*

Achieving a Perfect Balance

KLCC itself is the beating heart of Kuala Lumpur's business and leisure ecosystem. With over 20,000 hotel rooms nearby, including many within walking distance, delegates can enjoy the convenience of staying close to their event venues. KLCC's world-class facilities include purpose-built convention spaces and meeting rooms equipped with the latest technology, providing an ideal setting for conferences of any scale.

But what truly sets Kuala Lumpur apart is the plethora of leisure options available to delegates. The city offers a wealth of cultural landmarks, such as the iconic



© Tamil Selvam

Petronas Twin Towers, the bustling Merdeka Square, and the impressive Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia. These attractions make it easy for conference attendees to blend business with pleasure, ensuring that their trip extends beyond the confines of a meeting room.

The Benefits of Bleisure Travel

The rise of bleisure travel is not just a passing trend but a new way of experiencing business trips. Extending a work-related trip to include leisure time can lead to:

- **Enhanced Productivity:** A more relaxed environment fosters creativity and allows for more meaningful connections during the conference.
- **Improved Well-being:** Combining work and leisure helps reduce stress, ensuring that business travelers return home rejuvenated.
- **Cost Efficiency:** By combining work and leisure in a single trip, business travelers can maximize their travel budget, saving on the cost of separate business and vacation trips.

Kuala Lumpur is especially well-suited to cater to this trend. The city's diverse range of experiences—from upscale shopping at Suria KLCC to adventurous day trips to nearby national parks—ensures there's something for every kind of traveler.

Cultural & Natural Attractions

Kuala Lumpur's cultural diversity offers a unique and enriching experience for visitors. Whether exploring the vibrant Chinatown or enjoying the fusion of Malay, Chinese, and Indian culinary traditions, KL offers an array of experiences that cater to all tastes. For those looking for outdoor adventures, KL provides easy access to nearby national parks and reserves, offering opportunities for hiking, biking, and golfing, all within a short distance from the city centre.

Additionally, Kuala Lumpur's reputation as a multicultural melting pot means visitors can immerse themselves in the rich traditions and cultural heritage that the city has to offer, making their experience both educational and memorable.

Why Affordability Matters

Another major factor that makes Kuala Lumpur a standout bleisure destination is its affordability. Compared to cities like Singapore or New York, KL offers a high standard of living at a significantly lower cost. Visitors can indulge in luxury accommodations, dining, and entertainment for a fraction of what they might spend elsewhere.

The favourable ringgit with a stronger exchange rate also gives travelers more spending power, allowing them to stretch their budgets further while enjoying the city. On top of that, KL's lower cost of living—especially for essentials like food and transportation—makes it more

affordable than many other Southeast Asian capitals. This affordability is enhanced by government initiatives promoting tourism, which include business incentives and affordable lodging options, making Kuala Lumpur a highly appealing option for budget-conscious conference organisers and attendees.

A few cases in point: a five-star dining experience in Kuala Lumpur typically ranges from \$80 to \$200 per person, compared to \$300 to \$400 in New York or London. Similarly, accommodation in KL is significantly more affordable, ranging from \$120 to \$220 per night, depending on the time of year and hotel location. In comparison, similar accommodations in cities like Singapore, New York, or London can easily cost between \$600 and \$800 per night. This affordability allows business travelers to extend their stay and explore the city without breaking the bank.

If you're planning your next international conference, Kuala Lumpur and the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre should be at the top of your list. Not only will your delegates have access to the best business facilities, but they will also have the chance to explore one of the most dynamic cities in Southeast Asia.

Kuala Lumpur is more than just a city for business—it's a city for experiences, memories, and exploration. Plan your next conference in Kuala Lumpur and see why it's becoming the premier bleisure hub in Southeast Asia. Contact the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre now for more information: www.klccconventioncentre.com



By Remi Deve

Expanding Viral Frontiers in Cairns

When it comes to hosting international conferences, Cairns stands out for its exceptional blend of state-of-the-art facilities, stunning natural surroundings, and a deeply rooted commitment to supporting global scientific and business communities. This unique combination has positioned Cairns as a top destination for international conferences. Case in point: the Viruses of Microbes 2024 Conference, which took place at the Cairns Convention Centre in July 2024.

More than a convention centre

Cairns, in Tropical North Queensland, offers far more than a world-class convention centre. Positioned at the gateway to two UNESCO World Heritage Sites—the Great Barrier Reef and the Wet Tropics Rainforest—it provides a truly unique setting for international events. This exceptional combination of natural wonders creates an unmatched backdrop, where delegates can seamlessly blend conference activities with eco-tourism. The region also boasts over 160 eco-certified tours, the highest concentration in Australia.

“The decision to host the meeting in Cairns was a simple one,” remarked Associate Professor Jeremy J. Barr from Monash University, co-chair of the Viruses of Microbes 2024 Conference (VoM). *“Cairns offers a unique experience with its diverse wildlife*

and stunning scenery. It’s not often that one has a conference on a tropical coral reef with a rainforest just above.”

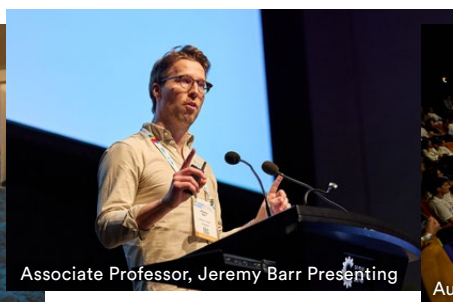
The natural beauty of the area, coupled with Cairns’ laid-back atmosphere and warm hospitality, makes the destination not only practical for conferences but also deeply memorable for international delegates. *“Cairns’ regional character has kept a local connected feel for the meeting,”* Barr added, highlighting the personal touch that the city offers.

The theme of VoM 2024, “Expanding our viral frontiers,” aptly reflected the fast-paced advancements in virology. It also marked the conference’s expansion beyond Europe, symbolizing both scientific innovation and the resilience of the global research community.





Delegates interacting in Exhibition Area



Associate Professor, Jeremy Barr Presenting



Auditorium Session for Viruses of Microbes

DEI at the Centre

Cairns Convention Centre is renowned for its exceptional service and attention to detail. After significant upgrades, the venue now features cutting-edge facilities, from advanced audio-visual systems to flexible spaces for large plenaries or intimate breakout sessions. Committed to accessibility and inclusion through its thoughtful building design, various programs and partnerships, it recently introduced the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Program, enabling delegates to discreetly indicate if they require extra assistance.

Aligning with this, VoM 2024 prioritized inclusivity and diversity, with a balanced speaker lineup that highlighted the value of varied perspectives in advancing science. The conference also focused on supporting students and early-career researchers (ECRs), dedicating 41% of symposium sessions to student presentations. Networking events and a pre-meeting workshop on science communication further enriched the experience for the next generation of phage researchers.

Kate Smith, Managing Director of WALDRONSMITH Management, which provided PCO services for the Viruses of Microbes 2024 Conference, praised the convention centre's seamless operations. *"The Cairns Convention Centre's meticulous planning and attention to detail provided a flawless experience,"* she said. *"Hosting young scientists from over 40 countries has been extraordinary. WALDRONSMITH was privileged to be part of this remarkable event."*

Supporting Science & Innovation

Cairns is not just a beautiful location; it's a hub for scientific research and innovation. The region is home to institutions like the Australian Institute of Tropical Health and Medicine (AITHM) at James Cook University, which is at the forefront of tropical health research. This makes Cairns an ideal destination for conferences focused on health, medicine, and environmental sciences.

During the Viruses of Microbes 2024 Conference, Cairns' role as a leader in tropical health was brought into the spotlight. *"The city's thriving health sector, combined with its proximity to world-class research institutions, makes it a prime location for conferences that focus on critical global health issues,"* said Robin

Mack, Executive General Manager of Commercial & Business Events Australia.

A Global Destination for Business Events

The recent upgrades to the Cairns Convention Centre and its ability to attract international events have not gone unnoticed. *"Queensland is fast gaining a reputation around the globe as a world-class events destination,"* said Michael Healy, Queensland's Minister for Tourism and Member for Cairns. *"The fact that Cairns was chosen to host the Viruses of Microbes Conference for the first time outside Europe is a testament to that."*

Mark Olsen, CEO of Tourism Tropical North Queensland, echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the significance of hosting such high-profile events in Cairns. *"Hosting the Viruses of Microbes Conference brought more than 500 global delegates to a region that offers a combination of world-class conference facilities and unique natural beauty,"* Olsen noted. *"The gala dinner at Rainforestation, where delegates dined in the rainforest and experienced Indigenous culture, left a lasting impression on our international guests."*

A Legacy of Excellence

Cairns and its convention centre have demonstrated that they can go beyond hosting conferences; they create lasting legacies. Events like the Viruses of Microbes Conference not only foster global collaboration and knowledge exchange but also shine a light on the region's scientific and economic contributions. The centre's ability to combine professionalism with the natural charm of Cairns makes it a standout venue for international conferences of all types.

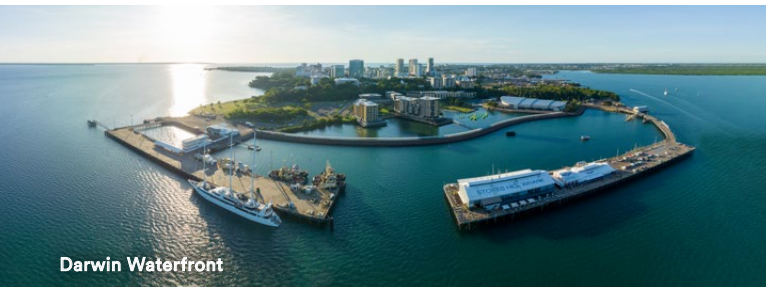
As Barr summed it up, *"Cairns Convention Centre has been incredible throughout this whole process. They've been extremely professional and responsive. It's been an optimal location for a conference—we couldn't have asked for anything better."*

Contact & Info

sales@cairnsconvention.com.au /
www.cairnsconvention.com.au

Australia's Northern Territory Delivers Global Expertise

The Northern Territory (NT) of Australia is not only rich in ancient culture, iconic landscapes and meaningful experiences but is also home to some of the world's leading research experts across a diverse range of industry and professional specialisations.



Darwin Waterfront

These include globally-renowned organisations such as the Darwin-based Menzies School of Health Research, a leader in tropical health research and the National Critical Care & Trauma Response Centre, which provides Australia's emergency response to national and international incidents. Institutions like these provide impetus for the NT to continue to attract prestigious international conferences.

Charles Darwin University (CDU) is another NT institution with internationally-acclaimed researchers delivering world-class projects, making a valued contribution to Australia and the Asia Pacific. CDU's Faculty of Science and Technology incorporates the innovative NT Academic Centre for Cyber Security and Innovation (ACCI) where Professor Mamoun Alazab, cyber security researcher and practitioner, is the inaugural Director.

Professor Alazab's award-winning research focuses on cyber security, data analytics and digital forensics, with an emphasis on cybercrime detection and prevention. Amongst many accolades, he has been recognised by the Australian Institute of Policy and Science for research excellence and enthusiasm for communicating science beyond the laboratory walls. Professor Alazab has also been ranked in the international Clarivate™ Highly Cited Researchers Top 1%. Clarivate™ is a leading global provider of transformative intelligence.

Professor Alazab and ACCI have been associated with one of CDU's important environmental projects which uses AI software and long-distance drones to identify the distribution of 'ghost nets' across nearly 958 kilometres of NT coastline.

These abandoned, lost or discarded fishing nets can cause serious injury or death to many marine species.

Professor Alazab spoke about how the Northern Territory fosters innovative thought leadership and enables ground-breaking collaborative undertakings.

"The NT's unique landscape and growing community create an environment ripe for innovation," he said. "I believe in the power of collaboration and the opportunity to contribute to the development of digital technology in this dynamic and evolving context. CDU embraces the inclusive, resilient and courageous spirit of the Northern Territory."

He made specific reference to how he believes staging a technology conference in the NT has capacity to yield innumerable benefits for individuals and organisations.

Professor Alazab is well-qualified, having delivered more than 130 conference presentations and convened or chaired in excess of 200 business events across Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Australia. He has served on 500 committees for the Association for Computing Machinery and IEEE, the global professional organisation dedicated to advancing technology.

Rebecca McCaig, Director of Northern Territory Business Events spoke about the NT's exceptional range of industry sectors and how they connect to business events.

"There are thirteen priority sectors in which the NT displays industry-leading expertise," she said. "Experts in these fields, like Professor Alazab, are very supportive of our efforts to attract international conferences to the NT, providing advocacy and invaluable insights, as well as technical tour options."

The Northern Territory Business Events Support Fund (NTBESF) offers funding assistance to organisers of qualified business events, commencing from a minimum AUD\$100 per delegate, with additional incentives provided for specific periods of the year.

For further information on business events in the NT, visit www.ntbusinessevents.com.au

See wonder

A photograph of three people (two women and one man) standing on a rocky outcrop, looking out over a vast, green landscape under a sunset sky. The woman in the foreground is wearing a light blue shirt and has a backpack. The man is wearing a light-colored shirt and dark shorts. The woman in the middle is wearing a green top and white pants. The background shows a wide, flat landscape with some vegetation and a distant horizon under a warm, orange and yellow sky.

Australia's Northern Territory offers a multi-sensory experience that transcends the physical and connects you to the land, the ancient culture and the people. We are a destination that empowers delegates to reconnect to what matters.

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