

Learning to speak with one voice

CMW REPORTS ON THE JOINT MEETINGS INDUSTRY COUNCIL'S GLOBAL WEBINAR SERIES THAT HAS BEEN DRIVING THE SOON-TO-BE-PUBLISHED MANIFESTO FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY USING BUSINESS EVENTS

These unprecedented times have brought about an unprecedented collaboration. On 2 July, the Joint Meetings Industry Council (JMIC) and its Iceberg project, with the support of four global industry trade events – AIME, IBTM, IMEX, and Meetings Africa – provided their platforms for industry leaders to contribute to a common global messaging campaign, the *JMIC Manifesto for Economic Recovery Using Business Events*.

This expert crowd-sourced Manifesto is to be used as an advocacy tool before government and decision-makers. And there is surely the need for the business events sector to align behind common messaging and to speak with a united voice.

JMIC president Kai Hattendorf introduced the project, describing the Covid-19 pandemic as the biggest threat to our industry in his professional career. Many elements of the sector had been grouped into generic “mass gathering” terminology, he said.

“As diverse as we are, we must be a united industry when we talk to decision-makers and lawmakers and those who we rely on to get back our licence to operate. We have to have the right words and messages to convince our customers and communities we work for that it is safe to return to events of all kinds around the world,” Hattendorf added.

Global cities authority professor Greg Clark took part in the interactive conversations advising on how to deliver key messages to governments most effectively.

JMIC executive director Rod Cameron said the project showed the industry had come together as one to sharpen its value proposition and make it easy to



understand the critical role that business events have to play in the post-Covid recovery.

Robert Coren, Curator of the Iceberg, JMIC's online platform dedicated to celebrating the legacies of business events, said two dozen videos or Zoom interviews had contributed to the project which had reminded the world what it had been missing these past few months. The contributors had reinforced the core Iceberg message of meetings industry value, which Coren emphasised was not all about the smaller visible hotel and travel spending element that pokes up above the 'Iceberg's surface, but about the weightier long-term benefits for society, of meetings that lie hidden under the water and which are harder to see and measure.

One of the European panellists was German Convention Bureau chief Matthias Schultze who stated succinctly: “Events are platforms for exchanging experiences and ideas”.

Strong soundbites followed from Oscar Cerezales, COO Asia for event management specialists, MCI Group, who added: “We grow, engage activate and

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monetise communities with events”; and from Caroline Teugels, executive director, International Federation of Podiatrists, who noted the impact of a congress was not only economic, but was big for individuals who participate because they get inspired and leave a legacy at a destination.

Teugels also noted the important role of associations and their meetings. “We are not for profit and all for purpose. We change the world and are the veins nurturing society.”

Sisa Ntshona, CEO South African Tourism, in his video contribution said: “When great minds get together they tend to come up with solutions.”

IMEX Group CEO Carina Bauer added: “Businesses and governments realise that the most effective way to communicate is through live events. That's why we were in a high in January 2020. We must remember and convey that in our messaging.”

Some urgency was injected by Lesley Williams, MD BestCities, who said it was “tragic” that our industry has had to practically crumble before government realised how valuable it is.

Along with the strong comments underlining the value of meetings, Lyn Lewis-Smith, CEO of Business Events Sydney noted that “the world had changed and turned upside down and stopped in its tracks in terms of us acquiring international events. Fellow Aussie Geoff Donaghy, CEO of ICC Sydney added that the industry revenues had dried up in Australia: “The A\$35bn that industry creates is no longer happening and that money is not flowing through to local businesses.”

It was a chain of thought echoed by Maurits van der Sluis, COO of RAI Amsterdam who noted: “A lot of people

are without work and a lot of companies are going bankrupt.”

Alessandro Cortese, CEO, European Society for Radiotherapy and Oncology, made the point that the losses were by no means just financial. “There is now less interaction at scientific level and fewer transfers between the business world and science and the development world,” he noted, while Tommy Goodwin, International Association Advocacy Practitioner said universities were missing collaborations and local government was not leveraging knowledge because of the lack of conferencing.

It was a point IAPCO CEO Martin Boyle, attempted to answer: “Governments that are serious about their economic and social recovery should be looking for drivers to facilitate this. I believe the business events industry will do just that.”

James Rees, ICCA president, added that introducing a destination to such knowledge-rich communities was indeed a driver for transformation and a perfect platform which, in turn, could secure the investment and knowledge transfer they require.

Kai Hattendorf reminded that it was exactly exhibitions and business events that were the meeting places and market places that everyone needs to recover after Covid-19.

Professor Clark concentrated on the relationship between meetings and business events and cities, noting that business events contributed to diversification and projected the soft power of a city. Meetings also provided strategic connections and long-term legacy in terms of breadth of supply chains.

Meetings could also help form a new normal, noted professor Clark and he identified several themes for the future, including nations becoming more self-sufficient in critical goods, a massive uptick in digitisation, new implications for human health and the environment and better connectivity. Meetings should be aligning with these themes, he thought,



and added there would also be new spatial patterns and ways of organising our lives, which all provided critical challenges but opportunities, too. Business events, he said, are a strategic tool in innovation ecosystems.

Professor Clark also saw associations as great “accelerators” for destinations, providing unique opportunities for storytelling and branding.

He did warn, however, that the coming likely recession and restrictions on travel would have a dulling effect on the market.

He saw a more blended meetings model between digital and real physical meetings emerging and he forecast more clusterisation and combined events.

In another of the video clips, Arnaldo Nardone, Director FIEXPO group, Uruguay, drew the distinction between organised business events and uncontrolled gatherings. “We can control events and meetings; we know the people who are coming; we know we have excellent protocols.

Singexpo Singapore’s CEO and president of venue association AIPC, Aloysius Arlando weighed in with some wise words. “Events need not be just a physical event but ongoing web engagement,” he noted. And he urged us all “not to waste a crisis. Necessity is the mother of invention,” he said.

IBTM World director Shane Hamann warned that events in future would look very different and the GCB’s Matthias

Above:

Advocates for change: Professor Greg Clark (left) and JMIC Manifesto curator Robert Coren

Schultze advised working “on innovative concepts and think future events on different levels; F2F, hybrid and purely digital”.

BE Sydney CEO Lyn Lewis-Smith said immediate future meetings would likely be local, and the problem would be how we beam them to the world.

Tommy Goodwin thought that destinations that were better at embedding their event in the community would have a competitive advantage. “Destinations that get it right will have a huge leg up,” he said.

After the Manifesto is published, what is to be done with it?

David Peckinpugh, president Maritz Global Events urged the industry to focus on economics when dealing with politicians.

Lewis-Smith said the narrative needed to be around innovation and knowledge. “This is our opportunity to be heard and become a strategic partner.”

Caroline Teugels added that we were not in the long queue for handouts from governments but in the short queue for helping.

We leave the last word with professor Clark and eagerly await the full draft Manifesto.

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