

The Power of Partnership

The Value of Working With CVBs

By Karen Brost



Brad Weaber
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“Technology can’t replace everything. CVBs are the seat on the street. They know their cities, they know the nuances.”

Between her current role as conference and special events manager for the Madison, WI-based World Council of Credit Unions (WOCCU) and her previous experience with the Greater Madison Convention and Visitors Bureau, Sue Sabatke, CMP, has learned a lot about the value of working with CVBs.

She is responsible for planning the annual World Credit Union Conference, which attracts more than 1,500 attendees from more than 50 countries. In the past few years, the conference has been held in destinations as diverse as Las Vegas, Barcelona and Hong Kong. This year’s conference will take place at the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre (SECC) in Glasgow.

Sabatke values the support that each destination’s marketing representatives can provide. “I think in the U.S., some people tend to skip CVBs because it’s quite easy to find those contacts yourself, or you may have an allegiance to certain brands. But when you’re overseas, sometimes you’re working with local or national brands that you don’t have (at home).

“Because we rotate around the globe, we’re not really able to keep any of our partners,” she con-

tinues. “We start out every year having to find AV companies and translation companies and printers, all of these partners that when you’re meeting in the U.S. could travel with you. We can’t do that when we rotate around the globe. It’s very different.

“After having worked at a convention bureau,” she adds, “I realize the economic impact that an event the size of ours can have on a local community. So we try to use local vendors as much as we can. The Glasgow Marketing Bureau has done a really good job of helping us forge those partnerships. They have a really good team of people. They really know their city, and they do a good job of promoting it and following through with the help that you need.”

Representatives from the Glasgow Marketing Bureau attended WOCCU’s 2010 conference in Las Vegas to help the organization get a jump start on generating interest in the 2011 event. “They worked the stand the whole time,” Sabatke notes. “They brought giveaways and helped create buzz. It has really made a difference for us this year. Whenever we would go anywhere, people all knew about our conference. I truly attribute that to the marketing bureau being onsite in Las Vegas and also to the allure that Scotland has.”

EXTRA EFFORTS FOR EXHIBITORS

Brad Weaber, executive vice president of



Photo courtesy of International Facility Management Association

event services for Chicago-based SmithBuckin Corporation has seen the role of the CVB evolve over the years. “In the past, we used them for lead referral and chasing down multiple hotels for citywides and things of that nature. Now there are online tools that will support that. But, he notes, “Technology can’t replace everything. CVBs are the seat on the street. They know their cities, they know the nuances.”

Weaber relies on CVBs to help him with marketing ideas, particularly in regard to exhibitors. “The exhibitor portion of our conventions is no longer just the five or six days of the meeting,” he says. “We’re looking at 365 days of commerce now in our exhibitor community. In order for us to build that commerce, we need to have support from our destinations. What I’m finding is that the creative cities are starting to get more and more engaged with organizations through their exhibitors. They are identifying, in advance, who they are and what they can do to help support them to keep them interested in the show. They’re actually trying to help solicit more sponsorship and more exhibitors to come to our shows.”

He elaborated on how exhibitors’ needs have changed. “The old way, you show up at the show, you go to an exhibitor and conduct business right there and right then. That’s not the norm any more. Most organizations now are finding that the exhibitor wants to have that constant connection with their buyers throughout the year, either through the association creating networking opportunities or through social media and things of that nature. The ROI component is completely different now.”

SERVICES AND SUPPORT

Sherri O’Neill, logistics manager for the Schaumburg, IL-based American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), says the marketing support she receives from CVBs for her annual convention is invaluable. AVMA’s event attracts 6,000–10,000 attendees each year, and future sites have been booked through the year 2024.

O’Neill relies on her CVB contacts to help her find vendors, secure special facilities for executive board dinners, and to provide information such as a list of restaurants that she can publish for her attendees. “Even though we don’t use them for

International Facility Management Association (IFMA) attendees are tuned in at the education session at IFMA’s World Workplace 2010 Conference & Expo in Atlanta, GA. Ann Burton, manager of conferences for the Houston-based association, says she partners with CVBs more now than ever to help select and market the destination for the annual event. This year’s event will be held in Phoenix.

housing, it's invaluable assistance. We've just had the best luck with our reps so far in every city." The group is meeting in St. Louis this year, and has met in Atlanta, Seattle, New Orleans, Washington, DC, and Honolulu in recent years.

"Each CVB has its own program," she notes. "For instance, St. Louis has a welcome program where they'll put signs in all the windows of the local retail establishments and restaurants welcoming us. They also put welcome signs in the airport and they do street banner signage."

"Atlanta," she continues, "actually has a telemarketing program, so for free they will do telemarketing calls to our membership in the Atlanta region, inviting them to the AVMA convention. We worked with them last year, and they were fantastic."

Ann Burton, manager of conferences for the Houston-based International Facility Management Association (IFMA), is finding that she's using the CVB's services more now than ever. "Typically, in the past, we've only had them come out the year before to exhibit to give people some information about the city. We weren't really using all of their services. But now, we actually send them our RFPs

for vendors, for housing, for everything. We have them send them out on our behalf, and say that we only want five (responses) back."

She reflected on the important role that CVB staff members can play. "If our point person, our key contact person, is really good and at the top of her game, it's definitely a huge reflection on the city. Orlando is definitely on top. They're probably the easiest city for us to

work with. They're such a convention city that they completely have it down."

Organizations planning meetings in Orlando can call on Tina Jones for assistance with building attendance. As the meetings and conventions marketing executive for the Orlando/Orange County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Jones works closely with planners to help them market their Orlando show or event to attendees.

IFMA's next conference will be held in Phoenix in October. "I've been really, really impressed with Stephanie Davidson, our Phoenix CVB rep, also,"

Burton notes. "We've already been on several sites. Stephanie picks us up from the airport, shows us whatever is new. She also set up a meeting with their PR department and our marketing person."

"Phoenix has so much going on in their city," she adds. "It's basically brand new within the last three years. They've sunk so much money into it, which is completely opposite from the rest of the country, where with the economy, everything has pretty much come to a standstill. Phoenix has just been rocking and rolling."

Since IFMA's attendees are facility managers, sustainability is naturally a hot topic. The Phoenix Convention Center's West Building is LEED Silver certified and its North Building was built to LEED standards. The facility, which offers more than 900,000 sf of event space, has a comprehensive recycling program in place along with many other green initiatives, but it's the little touches that captured Burton's attention. "Their chairs are all made out of recycled seat belts and car batteries," Burton explains. "The Sheraton (Phoenix Downtown, adjacent to the convention center) grows their own herb garden on their roof. It's just little fun stuff like that, quirky little FM (facilities manager) facts that totally speak to the sustainability movement. We like to put them in our marketing pieces."

The Quad Cities Convention & Visitors Bureau is offering a new meeting planner incentive program for meeting contracts signed by June 30, 2012. The QCCVB represents the cities of Davenport and Bettendorf, IA, and Moline, East Moline and Rock Island, IL. Incentives include four percent off the master room bill plus up to three additional incentives based on peak room nights with a two-night minimum. Choices include one complimentary room for every 25 rooms consumed, a free suite upgrade, a free beverage break, free onsite registration staff or free Loop transportation. The Loop is a new transportation service that offers visitors a convenient way to see all five cities.

LEGISLATIVE LEADERSHIP

CVBs also can play a key role in supporting legislation that impacts their city's convention business. When organizations began canceling their conventions in Chicago due to high costs, the Chicago Convention and Tourism Bureau (CCTB) and the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority (MPEA) worked with government offi-

cial and state lawmakers to support new legislation to remedy the situation. The new law, which calls for reforms that will lower costs for exhibitors, went into effect in May of last year. According to the CCTB, more than a dozen shows have signed with Chicago in recent months, including the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society Annual Conference & Exhibition, which is one of the shows that had pulled out of Chicago years earlier, citing cost factors.

However, on March 31 part of the law (those rules that give exhibitors expanded rights to work on their booths and that extend union workers' straight-time hours) were overturned by the U.S. District Court citing a violation of the National Labor Relations Act.

The MPEA requested the court to stay execution of the order. In the interim, the MPEA will continue business as usual at McCormick Place under the current laws and prepare an appeal.

CONVENTION CENTER UPDATE

Sabatke has found that there are several advan-



Photo courtesy of Greensboro CVB

tages of working with the **Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre** in Glasgow for her upcoming conference. "Some centers have a base price and they don't tell you about all these other things that aren't included in your contract," she notes. "The SECC takes a little bit more of an inclusive approach. When you rent certain rooms, they already include AV, a technician and a room steward. I think they know their building so well that they know what it takes from a staffing perspective, and they just include all of that upfront."

The skyline of Greensboro, NC — home to the Greensboro Coliseum Complex, which boasts a 167,000-sf Special Events Center that can be partitioned into four halls, leaving 60,000 sf for exhibits and a 4,500-seat general seating arrangement.



Ann Burton
Manager of Conferences
International Facility
Management Association
Houston, TX

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THE MIDDLE IS THE BEST PART.

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The Anaheim Convention Center offers 815,000 sf of exhibit space, making it the largest exhibit facility on the West Coast. The meeting and ballroom space totals 130,000 sf, conveniently located on the second and third levels, directly above the exhibit halls.

From my perspective, it was easier to have it factored in and know that it was included.

"Another thing that's nice is that the main room that we're using is an existing auditorium," she adds, "so it's really well equipped. From our perspective, it's nice to not have to deal with lighting. It's included as part of the facility rental."

The SECC includes 240,627 sf of flexible event space in five halls, 31 meeting rooms and two auditoriums. The 3,000-seat Clyde Auditorium is known as "the armadillo" because of its dramatic shell-like design. A new 12,000-seat venue, which will be named the Scottish Hydro Arena, is scheduled to open in 2013.

The **Albuquerque Convention Center** recently added a 360° virtual tour to its web site, www.albuquerquecc.com. The virtual tour makes it possible for planners to view the facility's Kiva Auditorium, exhibit halls, ballroom and other meeting spaces online. The center offers over 600,000 sf of usable space on three levels.

The newly opened 107,000 sf **Wilmington Convention Center**, located on the North Carolina city's historic Riverwalk, is awaiting LEED certification for its eco-friendly design. The building's low-VoC white roof reflects the heat from the sun to reduce energy costs. Other green features include natural lighting through floor-to-ceiling windows, and carpeting and upholstery made from recycled content. Each of the center's interior rooms also features individual lighting controls and energy management and air quality sensors.

Located in the heart of downtown Durham, NC, the 44,000 sf **Durham Convention Center** is com-

pleting an extensive \$6 million renovation project, which includes new lighting, in-house sound, digital signage and wall and floor coverings. The facility's Junior Ballroom is also being reconfigured to create additional breakout space.

The **Charlotte (NC) Regional Visitors Authority (CRVA)** is planning to capitalize on the increased interest in the city as a convention destination since it was named as the site of the 2012 Democratic National Convention. The CRVA is working with agency Eric Mower and Associates which has worked with such brands as I LOVE NY, to create a new marketing campaign called "Charlotte's Got A Lot."

This year, the new White Oak Amphitheatre and the ACC Hall of Champions opened on the campus of the **Greensboro (NC) Coliseum Complex** — one of the premier sports and entertainment facilities in the Southeast. With a seating capacity of 7,688, the amphitheatre hosts a diverse selection of community events, music, arts and crafts, and festivals. The entrance to the ACC Hall of Champions features a state-of-the-art video globe with a multimedia display of conference highlights. Scheduled to open soon on the campus, the Greensboro Aquatic Center is a state-of-the-art facility for all major aquatic sports — competitive swimming and diving, water polo, synchronized swimming and other unique sports — all in one venue.

The staff of the **Palm Beach Convention Center** is committed to giving back. In the past year, employees have volunteered their time to the non-profit organization Rebuilding Together, and they collected donations for a "Stockings for Soldiers" program and non-perishable food items for Tree of Life, a program designed to help men re-enter the work force after being homeless.

PARTNERSHIPS PAY OFF

In the end, getting the right support from a CVB and/or convention center can make a planner's life much easier. As Sabatke says, "If the convention bureau is not involved and you have a problem, you're sort of hung out to dry." Fortunately for her, she's looking forward to a positive experience in Glasgow based on the strong relationships she has built with the bureau and convention center. "It's a good thing I like the (Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre)," she laughs, "because I'm going to be spending a lot of time there." AC&F

green-centric; *adj.*, placing the planet at the center of an organization's business efforts



As the largest LEED-certified convention center in the United States, here's how the Anaheim Convention Center redefines "Green":

Culinary/Operational/Energy Sustainability

- On-site roof-top chef's garden
- First convention center to join the Seafood Watch program at Monterey Bay Aquarium
- Significant farm-to-fork program in place
- Beef provided through our own free-range herd; certified humanely raised, and grass fed and finished, ensuring a safe food source
- On-site Green Zone, a recycling and composting area that provides the Anaheim Resort District with fortified landscaping compost
- 65% of all waste diverted from landfill
- 1.5 megawatt rooftop solar array coming in 2012
- Environmentally Preferred Purchasing (EPP) to comply with green purchasing requirements

Equally important, we work with our customers, including Natural Products Expo West, on how to best embrace green policies.

Anaheim/OC "LEEDers"

(starting at the back row left to right)

Jim Tripp
General Manager, ARAMARK
Anaheim Convention Center

David Meek
Convention Center Manager
Anaheim Convention Center

Charles Ahlers
President, Anaheim Orange County
Visitor & Convention Bureau

Brian Daniels
Maintenance Manager
Anaheim Convention Center

Tom Morton
Executive Director
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